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SFX

361

SARAH MICHELLE GELLAR
EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW!

SINK YOUR TEETH INTO

TEEN WOLF: THE MOVIE AND WOLF PACK!

ENYS MEN
WHAT THE FOLK?

THE LAST OF US
THE VIDEOGAME COMES TO LIFE

STAR WARS
THE BAD BATCH RETURN

MAYFAIR WITCHES
ANNE RICE'S IMMORTAL UNIVERSE EXPANDS

LOCKWOOD & CO
THEY AIN'T AFRAID OF NO GHOSTS!

M3GAN
THERE'S A NEW KILLER DOLL IN TOWN

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First Contact

Hailing Frequencies Open!

It's time for Richard Osman's guest appearance.

WHO DO WE THINK WE ARE?

Ian Salsbury, email What a joy the final episode of Chibnall and Whittaker's *Doctor Who* was. A love letter to the show with some delightful nods to the past, wrapped up in a deliciously barmy plot. It was with heavy heart that I trundled over to the various forums and social media groups, expecting the usual naysayers and grouches... but no! What was this? A Chibnall episode that was getting universal praise? Almost everyone seemed to love it! Could this be a first?! After picking up *SFX* 359 however, it would appear not. What a miserable, misjudged review, and one that seems so at odds with the masses. I haven't been a huge fan of this era, but I'm glad that, for most of us, Whittaker and Chibnall went out on a high.

SFX: *Miserable and misjudged? No, just an honest reflection of personal opinion, like every SFX review. Happy to hear "The Power Of The Doctor" landed for you and obviously many others. Now where's that Doctorholics Anonymous spin-off series...*

HALO? NO, NO

Quintin Bynoe-Ogle, email In the November 2022 Halloween issue, reader Rob Graham wrote that *Halo* on Paramount+ "might be the best videogame adaptation of all time". I respectfully beg to differ. When looking at the translation of the experience of playing the game into the experience of seeing the movie, the most faithful game-to-movie adaptation might be 2014's *Need For Speed*. The standard plot of "wrongly accused hero proves his innocence" and the supporting characters were secondary to the real stars, the cars and the racing scenes, just as in the games. Yes, the *Fast And Furious* series is the go-to for racing films, but *Need For Speed* did it without jumping over the line and going tongue-in-cheek.

Loved *Andor* because there's no invulnerable mystical Jedis with lightsabers saving the day. Just normal people fighting back.

Stephen Doyle

The critical plot point [of *The Guardians Of The Galaxy Holiday Special*] is that Drax now wears shirts.

@LysanderWrites

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SFX

JANUARY 2023 | Issue 361
Future PLC, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA

Editor
Darren Scott **(DS)**
darren.scott@futurenet.com

Deputy Editor Ian Berriman **(IB)** ian.berriman@futurenet.com
Art Editor Jonathan Coates jonathan.coates@futurenet.com
Production Editor Ed Ricketts ed.ricketts@futurenet.com
Editor-at-large Nick Setchfield **(NS)**
US Editor Tara Bennett **(TB)**

Contributors
Saxon Bullock, Bryan Cairns, Sarah Dobbs, Rhian Drinkwater, Richard Edwards (RE), Dave Golder, Leon Hurley, Stephen Jewell (SJ), Luke Kemp, Catherine Kirkpatrick (Art Editor), Leila Latif, Miriam McDonald, Jayne Nelson, Steve O'Brien (SO), Will Salmon, David West, Jonathan Wright

Film Group, London
Group Editor-in-Chief
Jane Crowther
Group Art Director
Paul Breckenridge
Deputy Editor Matt Maytum
Art Editor Mike Brennan
Reviews Editor Matthew Leyland
News Editor Jordan Farley

Cover images
Teen Wolf and *Wolf Pack* © Paramount+/MTV/MGM/Orion.

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Printed in the UK by William Gibbons & Sons on behalf of Future. Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU
marketforce.co.uk
Tel: 0203 787 9001
ISSN 1358-5959

Advertising
Media packs available on request
Commercial Director Clare Dove
clare.dove@futurenet.com
Advertising Manager Simon Rawle
simon.rawle@futurenet.com
01225 687694
Account Manager Nick Hayes
nick.hayes@futurenet.com
01225 687236

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Customer service 0330 333 4333
Email help@mymagazine.co.uk
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Craig Niven
Circulation
Newstrade Director Ben Oakden

Production
Head of Production Mark Constance
Production Project Manager
Clare Scott
Advertising Production Manager
Joanne Crosby
Digital Editions Controller
Jason Hudson
Senior Production Manager
Maaya Mistry

Management
Managing Director, Games and Ents
Matthew Pierce
Design Director
Simon Maynard
Head of Art & Design
Rodney Dive
Director of Group Finance
Oli Foster

SFX (ISSN 1358-5959) January, issue 361, is published monthly with an extra issue in December by Future Publishing, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA, UK.
The US annual subscription price is $171.60. Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named World Container Inc., c/o BBT 150-15 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA.
Application to Mail at Periodicals Postage Prices is Pending at Brooklyn NY 11256.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to SFX, World Container Inc., c/o BBT 150-15 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA.
Subscription records are maintained at Future Publishing, c/o Air Business Subscriptions, Rockwood House, Perrymount Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex, RH16 3DH. UK

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"*Harry & M3GAN* would be a much better show"

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Rants & Raves

Inside the SFX hive mind

DARREN SCOTT EDITOR

RAVES

→ *Star Trek: Prodigy*'s finale was breathtaking. This feels like the most epic *Trek* yet.

→ Adored *Wednesday*. More please!

→ Season two of *Chucky* is now available in the UK on Sky Sci-Fi and NOW – it's barmy but brilliant. Here's hoping they get a season three!

RANTS

→ *American Horror Story: NYC*, while a great drama, was less a horror show and more a grim gay experience – and we have enough of those to contend with in real life.

IAN BERRIMAN DEPUTY EDITOR

RAVES

→ Intrigued by forthcoming Telos title *The Fanzine Book*, "the story of the underground *Doctor Who* press" – especially given how many *SFX* staffers past or present edited their own... I wonder if *Arc Of Infinity*, *Cybermag*, *Peladon* or *Paisley Pattern* will be featured?

→ Loving these mocked-up titles for a '70s *Andor* TV series: bit.ly/andortitles.

→ There's some great telefantasy TV on ITV X – *Sapphire And Steel*, *The Prisoner*, *UFO*...

JONATHAN COATES ART EDITOR

RAVES

→ Less than a year until the Tennant, Tate and RTD dream team return to the TARDIS. I'm so excited! Now's the perfect time to revisit series four while we count the days until November.

RANTS

→ Sadly *Andor* felt like it ran out of steam once he was sent to Narkina 5. I was left with a feeling of "Was that it?" by the finale. Hope the pace picks up a little bit in season two and we get to see a few more alien species.

ED RICKETTS PRODUCTION EDITOR

RAVES

→ Tentatively excited by the idea of a *BioShock* TV series, but only if they keep to the original story. There's enough bonkers wondrousness in the game's narrative without having to go off on a "reimagining".

→ On the subject of games, I found *The Last Of Me* to be rather like one long cut-scene interrupted by tedious and repetitive combat – which actually bodes quite well for the television adaptation.

NICK SETCHFIELD EDITOR-AT-LARGE

RAVES

→ The *Indy 5* trailer hits me in the Well of Souls. Love that we're seeing a "lost" Second World War escapade, especially as it looks like *Where Eagles Dare* with added MacGuffin. Roll on June!

RIP

→ Sad to hear of the passing of Tim Beddows, founder of Network. We archive TV enthusiasts are forever in his debt.

TARA BENNETT US EDITOR

RAVES

→ If you like your apocalypse stories with a hearty serving of satire, Noah Baumbach's *White Noise* (on Netflix from 30 December) is a surprisingly different take on the genre. Heightened, cinematic and very funny.

→ Love seeing Pedro Pascal get to do a great sci-fi performance without the hindrance of a mask in *The Last Of Us*. He's terrific.

"If the apocalypse comes, beep me."

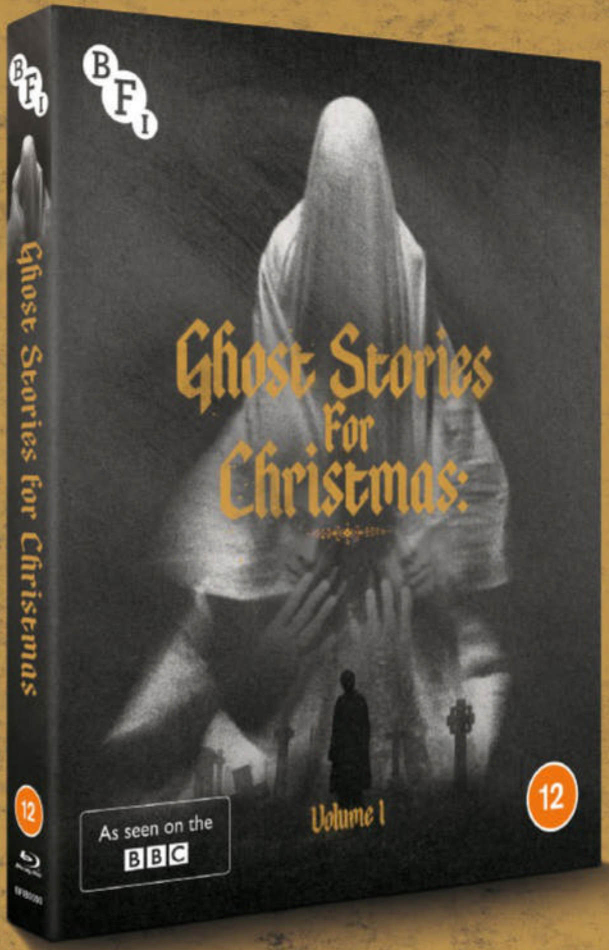
Captain's Log

This is always the Hellmouth of the year for us at *SFX* Towers. By the time you read this, likely most – if not all – of the festivities will be over. Meanwhile for us, the arrival of the advent calendar means that we've pretty much got two issues to get in the bag before everything grinds to a halt on 23 December. Yes, I know I say it every year but it's wibbly wobbly timey-wimey, aka a massive pain in the arse. I don't feel particularly festive these days – I'll spare you my Phoebe Cates *Gremlins* moment – so I'll be glad to get a fresh start of sorts in 2023. What a year it could be! *Doctor Who* turns 60. *Six decades*. That's incredible. We're going to try our best to celebrate our beloved series every single month this year. And *Star Trek: The Next Generation* is back in what looks like an incredible 10-hour film, for season three of *Picard*. What a time to be alive! Yes, I know we promised you that feature this issue, but deadlines are the deadliest enemy of all sci-fi! Next month, I promise! Meanwhile, there's a new supernatural show starring certified genre TV LEGEND Sarah Michelle Gellar. Who'd have thought it? Nothing's ever truly gone if you're a fan. As you can see in the photo up top, I got to rest my weary bones on the Nemeton in the Beacon Hills Preserve while in New York for Comic Con. But there's no rest for the wicked – you've got a new issue to read and we've got another one to finish! Happy new year, I hope that it's a great one for us all.

Darren
X

FOX

'These are some of the finest moments of British TV'
The Guardian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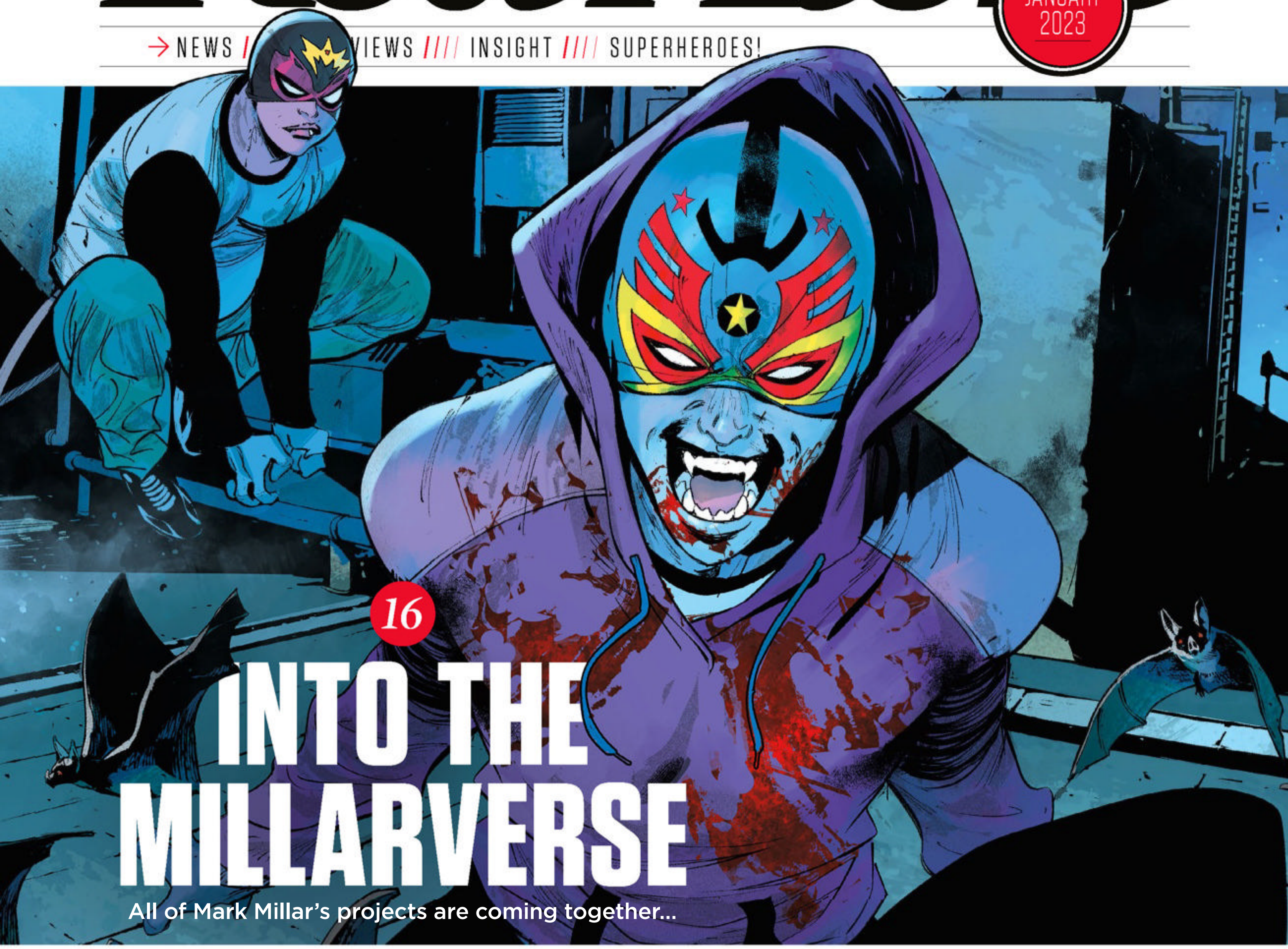

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All of Mark Millar's projects are coming together...

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BLAKE'S 7

→ Celebrating the 45th anniversary with recently discovered archive material.

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UNWELCOME

→ Prepare to meet the latest cinema nasties looking to give the Gremlins a run for their money.

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DOCTOR WHO

→ We continue our 60th anniversary celebrations with a new column bringing you *Doctor Who* news!

We're still mourning the loss of Gan in season two...

ALAMY

CREATOR EXCLUSIVE

The Great British Blake Off

Maximum power! Terry Nation's original take on **Blake's 7** arrives in book form

Blake's 7
ORIGINS
The Way Back | Spacefall
Cygnus Alpha | Time Squad
The Web | Seek-Locate-Destroy
Mission to Destiny | Duel
Project Avalon | Breakdown
Bounty | Deliverance
Orac | Redemption
BIG FINISH

CHARTING THE exploits of a band of interstellar freedom fighters – or terrorists, if you bought into the propaganda of the fiendish Federation – *Blake's 7* gave space opera a British twist in the late '70s. Now a new box set of novelisations is set to bring creator Terry Nation's vision to the page, adapting his recently unearthed original scripts.

"Early versions of the scripts had been in circulation for some time within fandom, but not all of them," says Jason Haigh-Ellery, managing director of Big Finish Productions. "I was not aware that the Nation family had variations of the scripts until one day when I was very kindly invited over to their house, and the subject came up and they said, 'Oh, we've got a load of scripts here!'

"These were Terry's original scripts, which he had sent through to Chris Boucher, the script editor. We had a look and realised that there were some alterations and differences to what was finally transmitted – mostly with regards to dialogue and also information about the characters. It gives a fuller view of the evolution of *Blake's 7*. It's Terry's view of the characters and the stories themselves."

Big Finish produce the *Blake's 7* audio adventures, but as Haigh-Ellery explains, prose was the best option for this project. "The excitement of finding out 45 years later that there was something new to say about these original stories was fantastic.

"The scripts aren't totally different, so it wasn't like, 'Oh, we could do a brand new audio drama with these' – and members of the cast have only recently passed on, so it was felt that recasting was not appropriate. The opportunity was there to do something a little bit different."

Released as a set of prestige editions to mark the show's 45th anniversary, the seven books adapt the 13 episodes of season one – plus "Redemption", the season two opener, also penned by Nation. "It seemed odd to do a series of books and finish on a cliffhanger, which is Orac's prediction [at the end of season one] that the Liberator is going to explode," Haigh-Ellery tells Red Alert.

"It felt better to book-end it. Fourteen episodes means that we also get seven books – and of course it's *Blake's 7*! It just felt right. So it means you have a beginning, a middle and an end to the sequence of stories, all written by Terry."

> "The opportunity was there to do something a little bit different"

While episodes of *Blake's 7* were previously adapted in the 1970s, these new books allow all the adventures to be retold in greater depth. "Our seven novelisations give equal weight to each of the 14 stories, with two stories in each book. The 1970s novelisations necessarily had to shorten each story to accommodate nine episodes within two books.

"Some of the episodes written by Terry have never been novelised and others have been truncated, so there was an opportunity to do full-length versions of those episodes, and do them with different authors to get different takes on *Blake's 7*, with well-known sci-fi authors."

Comics writer and *Doctor Who* scriptwriter Paul Cornell adapts opening episodes "The Way Back" and "Space Fall". "I wanted to bring to those first two episodes the feeling I'd had viewing them as a child," he tells Red Alert, "that this was all very serious and gritty and genuinely had something to say. But I also wanted to interrogate those scripts a bit from a modern perspective and ask about what wasn't there, and about how some of the pieces fit together.

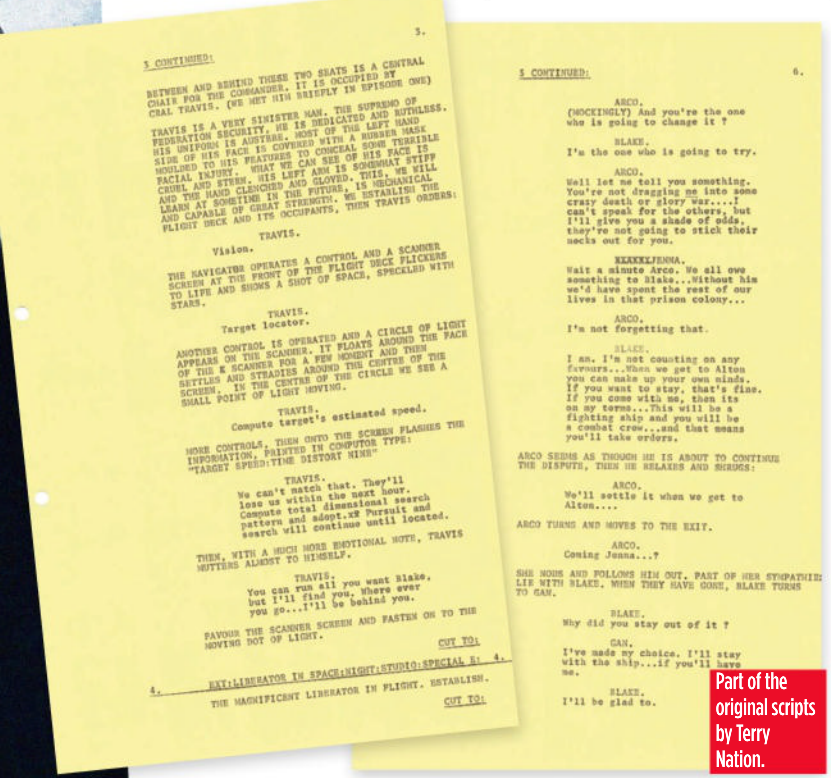
"I love that this is a show that is both a grim depiction of the detail of fascism and a romp, the camp of which is sometimes deliberate, sometimes not. Both elements are often present in the same episode. So it's just like real life."

Other authors in the range include Marc Platt, Gary Russell, Steve Cole, Una McCormack and James Goss, along with Jacqueline Rayner, who adapts "Mission To Destiny" and "Duel".

"On the surface it's the archetypical good versus evil story," says Rayner, "which is enormously attractive in itself, but it goes deeper than that. It doesn't shy away from what it means to act for the greater good. There are layers upon layers. It's the characters and their relationships that are the most fascinating part of the universe."

"I'm very excited about these as a *Blake's 7* fan from the first episode," says Haigh-Ellery. "Just the fact that we're going to get Terry's vision and really bring it to life in these novels with some amazing writers." **NS**

Blake's 7: Origins is out 27 March.



3.

5 CONTINUED:

BETWEEN AND BEHIND THESE TWO SEATS IS A CENTRAL
CHAIR FOR THE COMMANDER. IT IS OCCUPIED BY
CRAL TRAVIS. (WE MET HIM BRIEFLY IN EPISODE ONE)

TRAVIS IS A VERY SINISTER MAN. THE SUPREMO OF
FEDERATION SECURITY. HE IS DEDICATED AND RUTHLESS.
HIS UNIFORM IS AUSTERE. MOST OF THE LEFT HAND
SIDE OF HIS FACE IS COVERED WITH A RUBBER MASK
MOULDED TO HIS FEATURES TO CONCEAL SOME TERRIBLE
FACIAL INJURY. WHAT WE CAN SEE OF HIS FACE IS
CRUEL AND STERN. HIS LEFT ARM IS SOMEWHAT STIFF
AND THE HAND CLENCHED AND GLOVED. THIS, WE WILL
LEARN AT SOMETIME IN THE FUTURE, IS MECHANICAL
AND CAPABLE OF GREAT STRENGTH. WE ESTABLISH THE
FLIGHT DECK AND ITS OCCUPANTS, THEN TRAVIS ORDERS:

TRAVIS.
Vision.

THE NAVIGATOR OPERATES A CONTROL AND A SCANNER
SCREEN AT THE FRONT OF THE FLIGHT DECK FLICKERS
TO LIFE AND SHOWS A SHOT OF SPACE, SPECKLED WITH
STARS.

TRAVIS.
Target locator.

ANOTHER CONTROL IS OPERATED AND A CIRCLE OF LIGHT
APPEARS ON THE SCANNER. IT FLOATS AROUND THE FACE
OF THE K SCANNER FOR A FEW MOMENT AND THEN
SETTLES AND STEADIES AROUND THE CENTRE OF THE
SCREEN. IN THE CENTRE OF THE CIRCLE WE SEE A
SMALL POINT OF LIGHT MOVING.

TRAVIS.
Compute target's estimated speed.

MORE CONTROLS, THEN ONTO THE SCREEN FLASHES THE
INFORMATION, PRINTED IN COMPUTOR TYPE:
"TARGET SPEED:TIME DISTORT NINE"

TRAVIS.
We can't match that. They'll
lose us within the next hour.
Compute total dimensional search
pattern and adopt.x# Pursuit and
search will continue until located.

THEN, WITH A MUCH MORE EMOTIONAL NOTE, TRAVIS
MUTTERS ALMOST TO HIMSELF.

TRAVIS.
You can run all you want Blake,
but I'll find you. Where ever
you go...I'll be behind you.

FAVOUR THE SCANNER SCREEN AND FASTEN ON TO THE
MOVING DOT OF LIGHT.

CUT TO:

4. EXT:LIBERATOR IN SPACE:NIGHT:STUDIO:SPECIAL E: 4.

THE MAGNIFICENT LIBERATOR IN FLIGHT. ESTABLISH.

CUT TO:

---

5 CONTINUED: 6.

ARCO.
(MOCKINGLY) And you're the one
who is going to change it ?

BLAKE.
I'm the one who is going to try.

ARCO.
Well let me tell you something.
You're not dragging me into some
crazy death or glory war....I
can't speak for the others, but
I'll give you a shade of odds,
they're not going to stick their
necks out for you.

XLAKXXJENNA.
Wait a minute Arco. We all owe
something to Blake...Without him
we'd have spent the rest of our
lives in that prison colony...

ARCO.
I'm not forgetting that.

BLAKE.
I am. I'm not counting on any
favours...When we get to Alton
you can make up your own minds.
If you want to stay, that's fine.
If you come with me, then its
on my terms...This will be a
fighting ship and you will be
a combat crew...and that means
you'll take orders.

ARCO SEEMS AS THOUGH HE IS ABOUT TO CONTINUE
THE DISPUTE, THEN HE RELAXES AND SHRUGS:

ARCO.
We'll settle it when we get to
Alton....

ARCO TURNS AND MOVES TO THE EXIT.

ARCO.
Coming Jenna...?

SHE NODS AND FOLLOWS HIM OUT. PART OF HER SYMPATHIES
LIE WITH BLAKE. WHEN THEY HAVE GONE, BLAKE TURNS
TO GAN.

BLAKE.
Why did you stay out of it ?

GAN.
I've made my choice. I'll stay
with the ship...if you'll have
me.

BLAKE.
I'll be glad to.

Part of the original scripts by Terry Nation.

SCI-FACT! **Terry Nation originally wanted the Daleks to appear in season two finale "Star One".**

WRITER/DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

Illumi-naughty

The fourth and final season of **Servant** promises answers

Making a deal with the Devil… Well, a skeleton.

Wait a sec, is that Jericho going for a ride?

IT'S GOING TO BE a showdown of the maternal figures in the fourth and final season of *Servant*. The ongoing battle of wills between nanny Leanne Grayson (Nell Tiger Free) and high-strung mama Dorothy Turner (Lauren Ambrose) over the safety of baby Jericho is finally coming to a head, and it's going to get wild.

The horror/thriller series from executive producers M Night Shyamalan and Tony Basgallop has quietly become one of streaming TV's under-the-radar gems. Claustrophobically set (and primarily shot) inside the well-appointed Philadelphia home of the affluent Turners (Ambrose and Toby Kebbell), *Servant* left audiences aghast at the third season finale, as the rot inside the house caused Dorothy to fall to what looked like her demise.

JERICHO AND CO

Series writer/director Ishana Night Shyamalan (Night's middle daughter) tells Red Alert that after such a visceral cliffhanger, the power dynamics inside the house are forever changed. "The idea was to come into this season a couple of months later, with Dorothy re-entering the house," Shyamalan teases. "And she's pretty powerless in her own home. Things have shifted in favour of Leanne." Citing *What Ever Happened To Baby Jane?* and *Misery* as touchstones for the season, Shyamalan adds: "We thought there was something classical about that approach, of someone being physically not the most powerful person in the house and what that does to the environment."

With only 10 episodes left to tie up the various mysteries of the series, including what powers Leanne has, what the Church of Lesser Saints cult wants with her, and whether baby Jericho is actually even alive or not, Shyamalan says that her dad and all the writers went into this season with some clear goals. "We know that the expectations of the audiences that are watching this show are to get a certain level of information, so we did definitely attempt to do that," she says.

"There's a couple of episodes that are deepening the mythology of the cult, explaining some of their belief systems and what they do. There's a little bit of mystery about them that we wanted to maintain, to keep them as a symbolic thing. But there are some really exciting conclusions to them closer to the end of the season."

"A couple of episodes deepen the mythology of the cult"

In film land Covid is still a big deal, for safety reasons.

Most importantly, Shyamalan says that all of the characters in the ensemble get arcs that have organic resolutions. "We were just letting the storylines that we've built guide us to the end, trying to make sure that each of the characters felt concluded, and that we answered all the mythologies that we built up," she says. "In that way, I would say [the story] was more leading us than we were leading it with any kind of intention."

She adds that the series' ongoing themes of "oppression

You were expecting a happy birthday? Noo.

and power and belief” are still part of the narrative spine, but there are other threads that will come up too. “At the end of the season, it’s about the acceptance of these dark elements and dark things that have happened in this family’s life. I think the throughline is of them trying to reach a place of acceptance and growth.”

A lot of that is going to come through the personal journeys of Leanne and Dorothy, who have increasingly clashed with one another. Each season, Dorothy has remembered more about the tragic events surrounding her son, and Leanne – who initially seemed to have orchestrated a miracle – has become more emboldened about her power inside the Turner home.

Shyamalan says with regards to Leanne, “We’re continuing along the trajectory that she’s discovering her power, but it’s almost tipped over the edge and become this perverted thing. She’s lost a bit of control in her own abilities and what she’s doing, so it’s a darker take on that young woman’s desire for power. And it’s only through love, at the end of the day, that she really is able to discover herself.”

As for helicopter mom Dorothy, who deftly rides the line of heroine/villain, Shyamalan praises Ambrose for bringing both fun and incredible distaste for her character’s actions to the role, leaving audiences constantly on edge. “I think that Dorothy’s had a lot of misfortune coming onto her. And this season, it’s really about her physical agency and emotional agency. I think she really evolved into this beautiful, strong character who is both eccentric and really, really grounded.

“It’s just a very exciting arc,” she concludes. “I think, at the end of the day, she comes off being a really wonderful mother, actually.” **TB**

Servant is on Apple TV+ from 13 January.

SCI-FACT! **Ishana Night Shyamalan has confirmed she’s prepping her first theatrical film, set to shoot in 2023.**

NEWS WARP

HIGH-SPEED INFORMATION

→ *Raised By Wolves*’ Travis Fimmel joining prequel series **Dune: The Sisterhood**.

→ *Blade Runner 2049*’s Michael Green writing **Bioshock** adaptation for Netflix.

→ *Rogue One* droid K-2 set to appear in season two of **Star Wars: Andor**.

→ Sony launching a small-screen Spideyverse with **Silk: Spider Society**, showrun by *The Walking Dead*’s Angela Kang.

→ Disney+’s **Indiana Jones** series rumoured to focus on Abner Ravenwood, Indy’s mentor.

→ Netflix turning Xbox franchise **Gears Of War** into a live-action film and animated series.

→ Lin-Manuel Miranda is Hermes in Disney+’s **Percy Jackson And The Olympians** series.

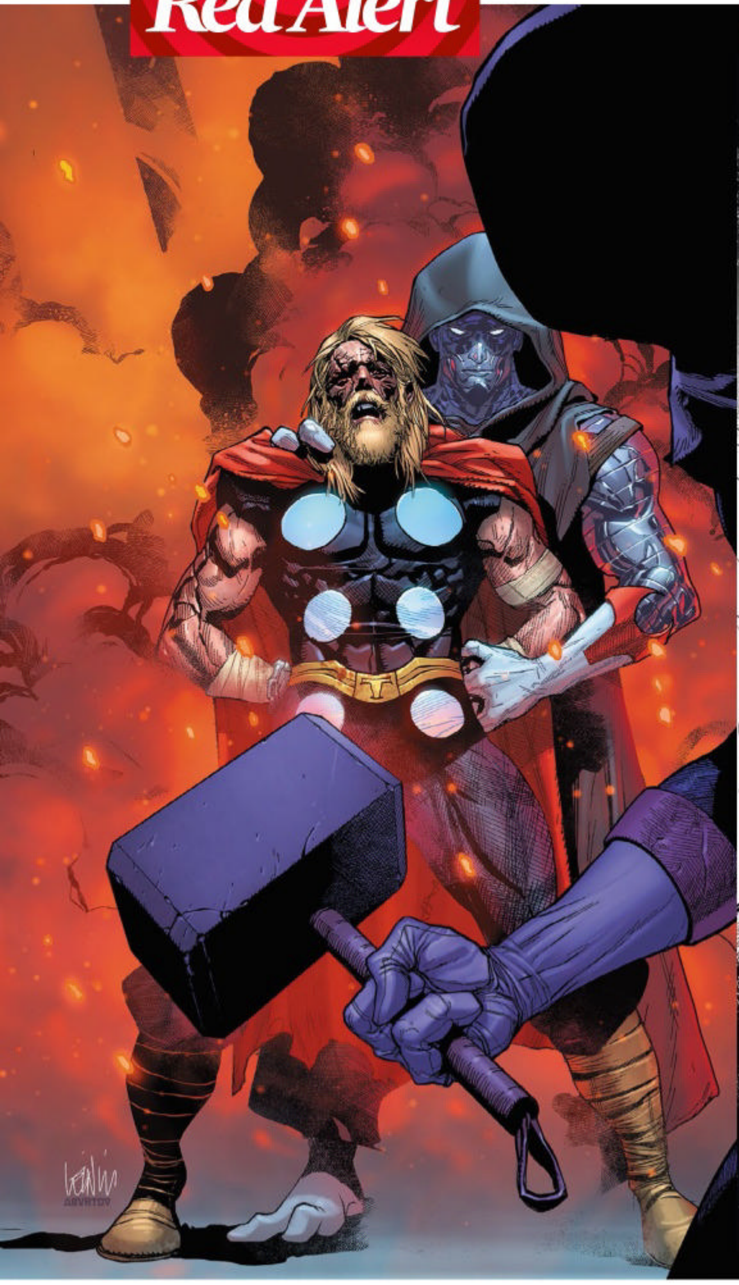
→ Stephen R Lawhead’s Arthurian novels **The Pendragon Cycle** set for TV adaptation.

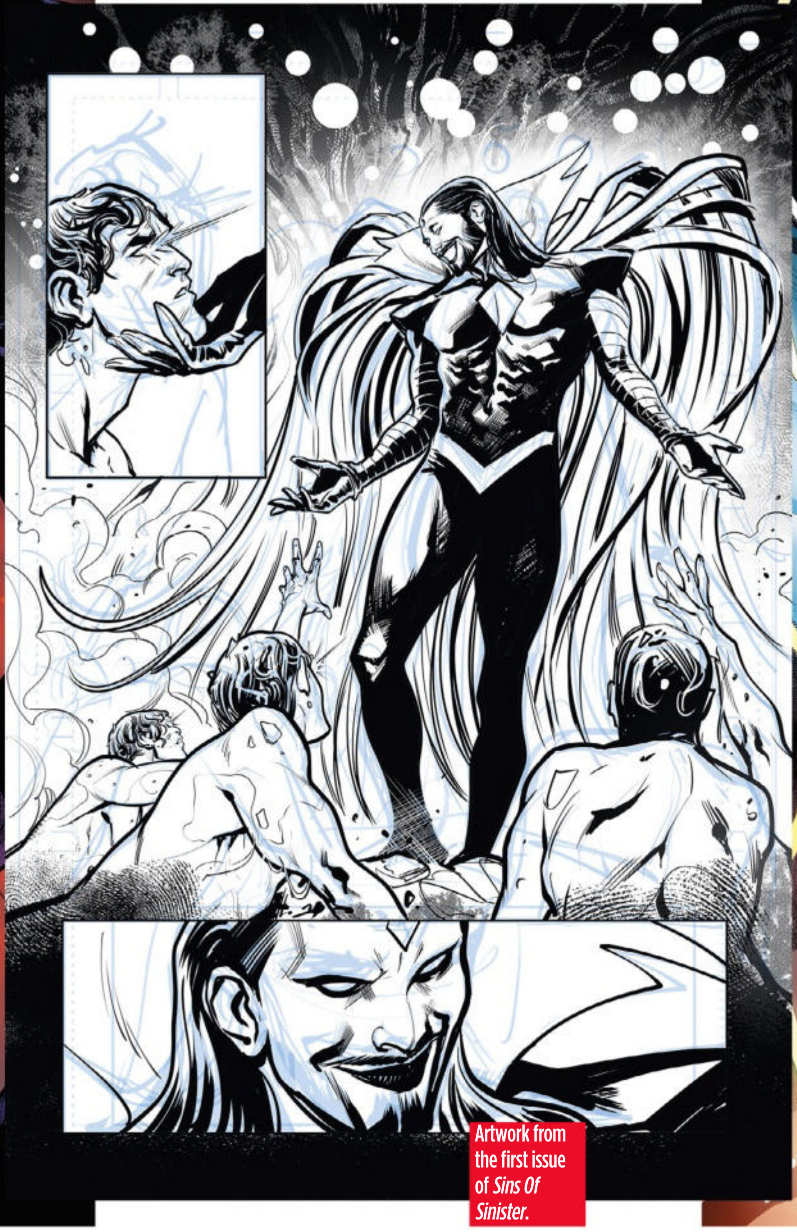
→ Jason Fuchs and Brad Caleb Kane to showrun **IT** prequel series for HBO Max.

→ Ayn Rand’s 1957 dystopian novel **Atlas Shrugged** heading to TV.

→ **The Midnight Club** cancelled by Netflix after creator Mike Flanagan signs with Amazon.

GETTY





Artwork from the first issue of *Sins Of Sinister.*

WRITER EXCLUSIVE

Clone Wars

Kieron Gillen explores the Ages Of Apocalypse in new X-crossover **Sins Of Sinister**

AFTER LAST YEAR'S *Avengers X-Men Eternals: Judgment Day*, you might have thought Kieron Gillen would have had his fill of huge crossover events. But he's now helming *Sins Of Sinister*, which while confined to the world of the Merry Mutants nevertheless spans a millennium of X-history.

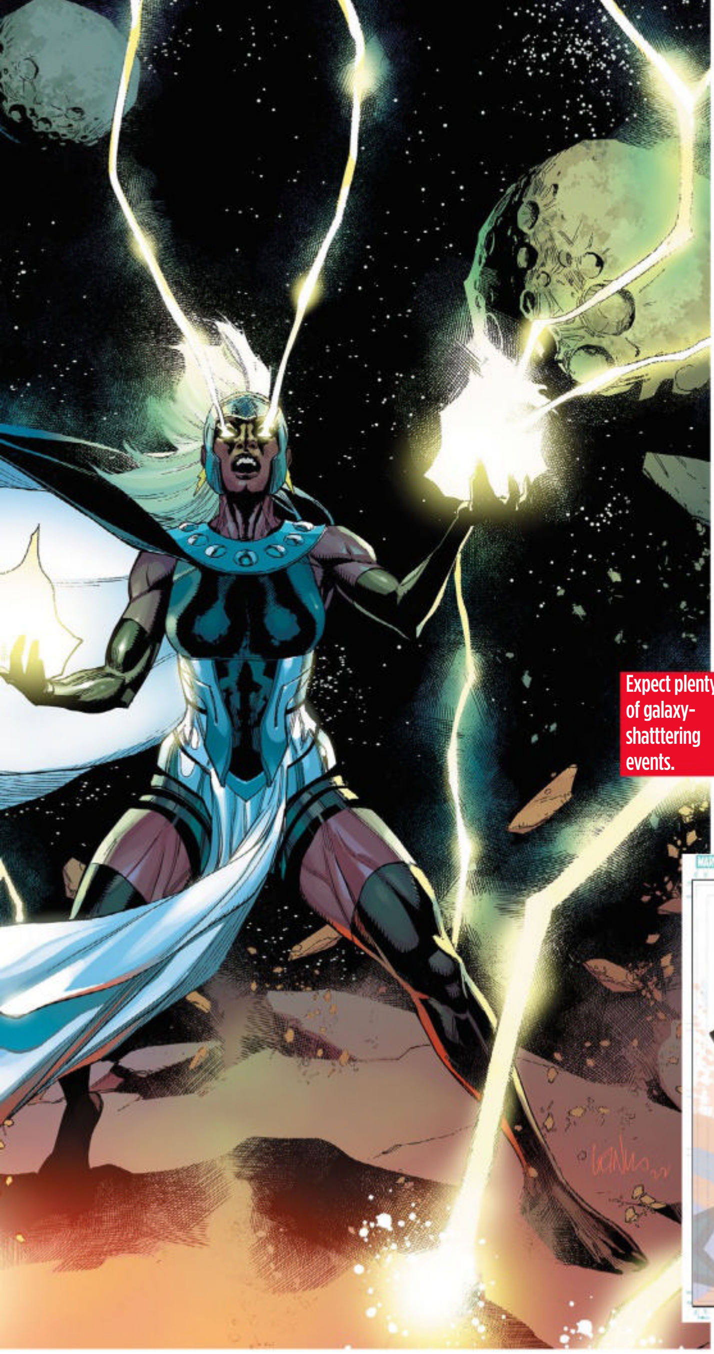
"*Sins Of Sinister* grew from the Moira Engine plot in *Immortal X-Men*," he tells Red Alert. "By cloning Moira MacTaggart, Sinister's gained the ability to reset the timeline, essentially using Moira as save points and videogame save-scumming his way through history. *Sins Of Sinister* takes from that and is set in a timeline where things get entirely out of control across a thousand years of history."

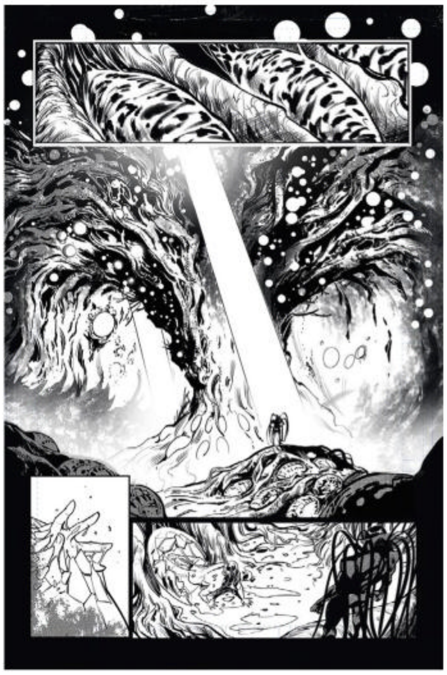
Beginning with an alpha issue before continuing in three interlinked miniseries, *Sins Of Sinister* appears to hark back to classic 1995 crossover *Age Of Apocalypse*, which also featured the malevolent mutant in a prominent role.

However, despite *Sins* also being set in a devastated alternate future, "*Sins Of Sinister* is so much bigger than *Age Of Apocalypse* in its scope," Gillen explains. "Rather than a planet, it takes place across the whole galaxy, by the thousandth year, as its awfulness reaches levels of grimdark impossibility."

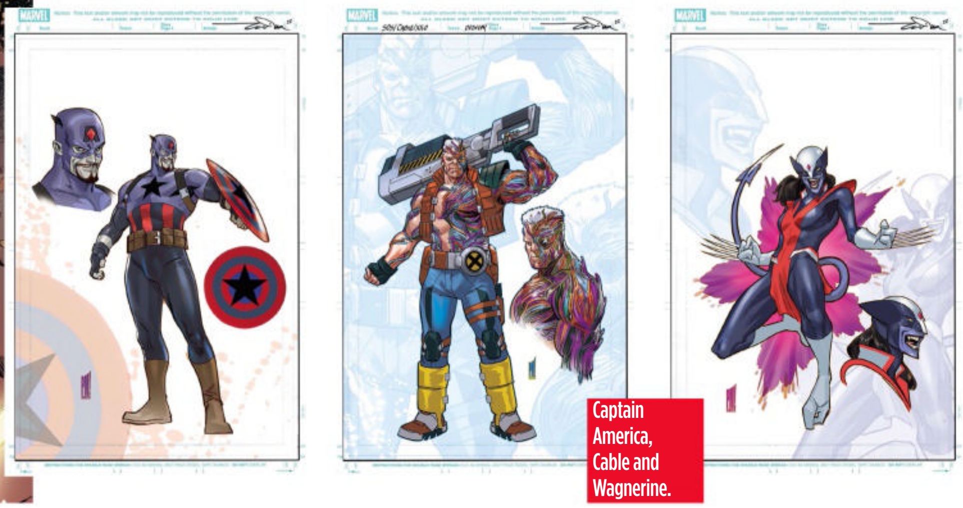
Describing him as "an outright villain, who's fascinating to watch, and is absolutely the villain of our piece," it centres on the former Victorian biologist Nathaniel Essex's ability to endlessly replicate himself, and expands upon that to an absurdly infinite degree. "In terms of Sinister variants, there's a lot, as he gets everywhere. I get to do a JJ Jameson Sinister in the first issue, which is obviously me completing a life goal," laughs Gillen. "The real fun stuff is what we're doing with Sinister Chimeras, which is where a cloned mutant has multiple X-genes together and working out combinations is like genetic cocktail science."

Illustrated by Lucas Werneck, the series opens with Mister Sinister being thrown into a pit. "In 10 years' time, where the majority of the issue is set, he's ruling the planet," reveals Gillen. "*Sins Of Sinister* issue one is basically describing how on earth





Expect plenty of galaxy-shattering events.



Captain America, Cable and Wagnerine.

he pulled that off by building on all his machinations in the Krakoan age. As such, his sins are many!"

Eventually concluding in April's *Sins Of Sinister: Dominion* issue one, the miniseries *Immoral X-Men*, *Nightcrawlers* and *Storm & The Brotherhood Of Mutants* will have each of their three issues set respectively 10, 100 and 1,000 years hence. "Each era has its own vibe," teases Gillen. "The +10 issues are the near future *Invasion Of The Body Snatchers*, cyberpunk dystopia. +100 goes galactic, and I basically think of it as Shithead *Star Trek*! By +1000, it's imploded into an operatic, galaxy-wide horror-scream, a grim future where there is only Sinister, lots of flavours and lots of sins."

Nightcrawlers features a plethora of demonic-looking Logan/Kurt cross Wagnerine, whom Gillen lauds as "amazing". "*Nightcrawlers* is a chance to mash together countless weird and wonderful combination of mutant genes and send them out into a universe that just keeps getting more and more horrible," says scripter Si Spurrier.

"It's a chance to play with questions about nature vs nurture, the spirit vs the flesh – all those bright and breezy themes I'm so well known for! – and really dig deep into the faith, mythology and soul of Marvel's merry mutants. To me, *Sins Of Sinister* feels like we're introducing a dose of *2000 AD*-esque anarchy to the Marvel Universe, as it's characterised by a near-bottomless hunger for ideas."

Al Ewing, meanwhile, is helming *Storm & The Brotherhood Of Mutants*. "Storm's been leading the Brotherhood of Arakko since *X-Men: Red* issue one, so this was an opportunity to extend that into the future in ever-expanding increments," he says.

"As for who's involved, the line-up changes a lot through the centuries, but a couple of familiar faces remain as constants, including a new face from the future of *X-Men: Red* because I thought it'd be fun to introduce a character's possible ending before showing how he began, which is the kind of fun you can have with this kind of 'dark future' story."

Along with their overlapping storylines, the miniseries will all also be linked by having the same artist illustrate each of their respective first, second and third issues. "The idea is to give each period its own coherent vibe," explains Gillen. "So, Paco Medina is handling the superhero vibe of the near future +10 period, Andrea Di Vito is doing the bright-outfits-but-dark-souls of the +100, while Alessandro Vitti is just going full horror with the +1000." **SJ**

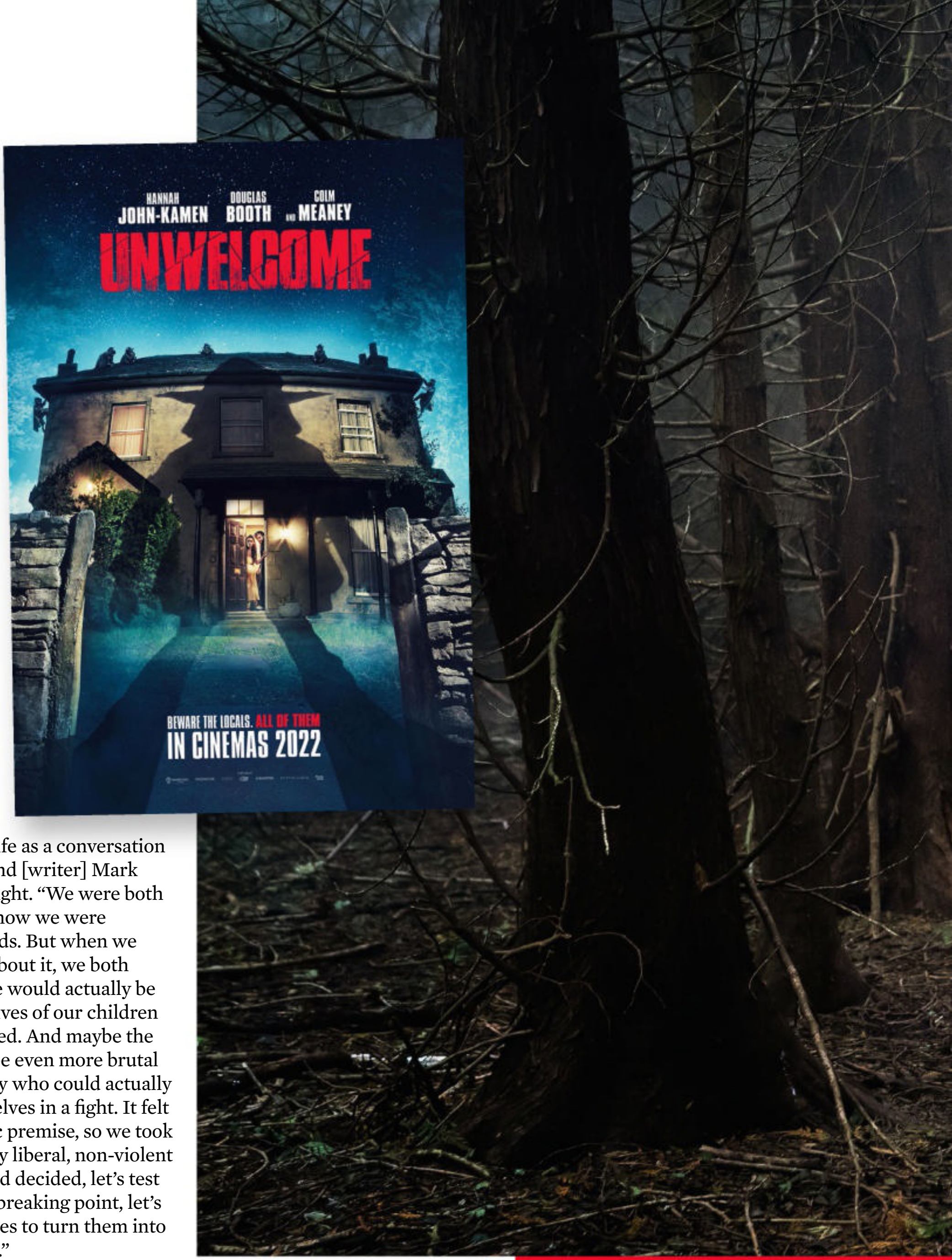
Sins Of Sinister 1 is out on 25 January, Storm & The Brotherhood Of Mutants 1 is out on 8 February, Nightcrawlers 1 is out on 15 February and Immoral X-Men is out on 22 February.

SCI-FACT! **Created by Chris Claremont and Marc Silvestri as a villainous alternate to Magneto, Mister Sinister debuted in 1987's *X-Men* 221.**

DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

In The Night Garden

Jon Wright goes folk horror with **Unwelcome**



"*GREMLINS* MEETS *Straw Dogs*" – that was how director Jon Wright pitched his latest horror, about a married couple who move from London to rural Ireland to escape the hustle and bustle of city life, only to come under attack from a breed of malevolent, murderous goblins named Redcaps.

"We knew we wanted to do something in Ireland, and were looking at myths and legends and fairy tales," Wright tells Red Alert. "We came across this legend of Redcaps, who are goblins who dip their caps in the blood of their victims. We thought that was quite an interesting way into Irish folklore because it felt a little bit like leprechauns, but when you scratch the surface, it was anything but cutesy gnomey-type people with fishing rods and colourful hats."

At the centre of *Unwelcome* are Jamie and Maya, played by Douglas Booth and Hannah John-Kamen, a liberal, metropolitan couple who relocate believing they're swapping the intensity of urban life for something more peaceful – only to find threats not only from the human locals, but also from these goblins.

"It started life as a conversation between me and [writer] Mark Stay," says Wright. "We were both talking about how we were terrible cowards. But when we were talking about it, we both agreed that we would actually be violent if the lives of our children were threatened. And maybe the violence will be even more brutal than somebody who could actually handle themselves in a fight. It felt like a dramatic premise, so we took our pair of very liberal, non-violent Londoners, and decided, let's test this theory to breaking point, let's see what it takes to turn them into violent people."

GOBLIN IT UP

That threat could have easily been, as in *Straw Dogs*, entirely human, but Wright always wanted *Unwelcome* to have a fantastical element. "Rather than doing a kitchen sink, realistic version of the story," he says, "we wanted to do something that was quite imaginative and far-fetched, and explore the story that way. My favourite genres are fantasy, horror and science fiction, and when I look at a film or a television show, I want to have a window into a world I've never seen before."

For the Redcaps, Wright decided not to go down the CG route, choosing instead "a real mash-up of old-school and new-school techniques." The trailer doesn't give away what they look like, but rest assured, they're not going to resemble *Harry Potter*'s snooty bankers or the critters from 1988's *Hobgoblins*.

"They do feel very physical and real," the director says. "*Gremlins* is obviously a great movie and a big influence on me, but when I look at it now, [the Gremlins] don't really hold up to scrutiny. When they're in close-up their faces look very rubbery.

"What we've got is a marriage of techniques that looks very effective, and gives them weight and a reality and makes them feel like they're actually in the house. I'm really pleased with how the goblins turned out – I think they're really cool and frightening."

Douglas Booth as Jamie: "*Countryfile* lied to me!"

Hannah John-Kamen as heavily pregnant Maya.

The dog had better be okay or there'll be *trouble*.

Wright categorises *Unwelcome* as folk horror, a genre he's particularly keen on. "It starts in urban London before it spins off into the Irish countryside," he explains. "I'm very drawn to folk horror. I feel like a lot of us have a feeling that we're spending too much of our time looking at screens and living in this artificial world that we've constructed for ourselves and that we're very isolated from nature. I think that yearning to be part of nature is quite strong with a lot of people."

Heading up the cast is Hannah John-Kamen, better known as Ornela in *Game Of Thrones* and as the MCU's Ava Starr/Ghost, and the director can't help but rave over his leading lady. "She's extraordinary in this film," he gushes. "We wanted somebody who's going to really feel like a fish out of water in an Irish town, and I think Hannah is that, she's very sort of urban. I knew she was a good actress but every day on set, she would do something that blew me away."

Unwelcome is Wright's fourth movie after 2009's *Tormented*, 2012's *Grabbers* and 2014's *Robot Overlords*, but it seems like his time making this film has been the most rewarding, not least because he experienced little to no interference from above.

"There are some really big people involved, not least Warner Bros, but nobody tried to change the film," he says. "As the rushes came in, everybody seemed delighted with it. Probably out of everything I've made, it's the most me, the film that I've put the most love into. So it'll be interesting when it comes out, because I'm going to take it quite personally if people don't like it!" **SO**

> **"Probably out of everything I've made, it's the most me"**

Unwelcome is in cinemas from 27 January.

SCI-FACT! **Wright has also directed episodes of *Brassic*, *Our Girl* and *The Good Karma Hospital*.**

NEWS WARP

HIGH-SPEED INFORMATION

→ *Night At The Museum*'s Shawn Levy in talks to develop and direct a **Star Wars** movie.

→ Daniel Kaluuya voicing Hobie Brown aka Spider-Punk in **Spider-Man: Across The Spider-Verse**.

→ *Mare Of Easttown*'s Cailee Spaeny in the frame for the next **Alien** instalment, directed by Fede Alvarez.

→ Margot Robbie's **Pirates Of The Caribbean** spin-off is dead in the water.

→ *Stranger Things*' Joseph Quinn joining *A Quite Place* prequel **Day One**.

→ Yann Demange replacing Bassam Tariq as director of Marvel's **Blade** reboot.

→ Animated **Avatar: The Last Airbender** movie targeting a 10 October 2025 release.

→ *Scream 6* directing team Matt Bettinelli-Olpin and Tyler Gillett linked to remake of **Escape From New York**.

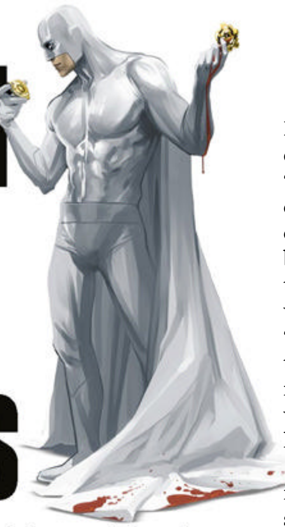
→ Jamie Lee Curtis and Lindsay Lohan in talks with Disney for **Freaky Friday** sequel.

→ Lionsgate bringing arcade classic **Streets Of Rage** to the screen with a script by *John Wick*'s Derek Kolstad.

GETTY

WRITER EXCLUSIVE

Darkest Knight Returns



Mark Millar brings back his biggest bad guy in **Nemesis Reloaded**

WITH 2023 MARKING the 20th anniversary of Mark Millar's first creator-owned series *Wanted*, the next 12 months are set to be a banner year for the Scottish writer. Not only will it see the return of the titular infamous supervillain in *Nemesis Reloaded*, but also the debut of vampire miniseries *Night Club*, both of which lead into event book *Big Game* in the summer.

"Our books over the next few months lead into a crossover, which ties together all the Millarworld franchises," Millar tells Red Alert. "There are actually 24 franchises altogether if you count series like *Kick-Ass*, *Kingsman* and *Hit Girl*, so we're putting them in one mega-story, which brings all of them together."

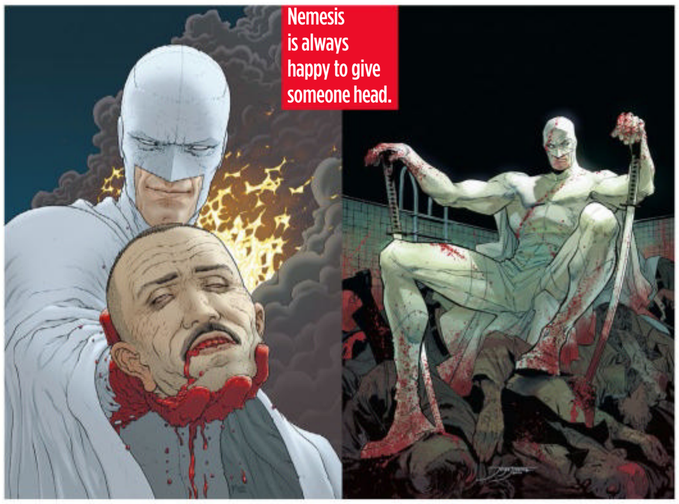
Originally drawn by Steve McNiven, *Nemesis* was first published in 2010 by Marvel's Icon imprint. "*Nemesis* is the thing I'm asked about most, which is weird as it came out 12 years ago and was only four issues. People have always been interested in it, as it's a cute idea – the idea that Batman was a bastard instead of a good guy, which worked on a really simple level."

Based on the premise of "What if Batman was the Joker?", *Nemesis* combines elements of both the Caped Crusader and his most notorious arch-enemy. "I noticed a few years back that Batman movies with the Joker make a lot more money than those without," reasons Millar. "There's something about those chaotic characters that people prefer. Supervillains are such an untapped thing, as we've had all these millions of superhero projects out there for the last 22 years in the cinema. But you don't really get so much in terms of villains, which is odd in a way because the cornerstones of cinema are gangster and crime movies."

Nemesis Reloaded issue one opens with Nemesis waging war on the Los Angeles police, and Millar delighted in refining the details of his nefarious schemes. "It's a super-elaborate, really complex plot that I planned carefully over two or three weeks before I started writing," explains the creator, who has changed his working method in recent years. "What I do now is very different to what I used to do, which was to make it up as I went along – that was the way I worked for the first half of my career.

"I would think of a really interesting splash page and tell the story from there as a sequence of really interesting moves. Whereas what I do now is work out my ending in intricate detail and reverse-engineer the story from the ending, then work my way back to page one. I write everything backwards, which I've done for about 10 years, and it really works well. What's great is that people think it's really clever plotting, which ties everything together beautifully, but it's only because the ending was my starting point."

As McNiven is signed exclusively with Marvel, Millar tapped current *Batman* artist Jorge Jiménez to illustrate the new five-parter. "He was ideal," he says. "I just thought, 'Who's the biggest artist in the industry right now?', which sounds crass but it's how I think – 'Who's the biggest name I can steal?' Jorge is like DC's darling, and I couldn't believe I got him. I love his subversion, and if you look at his *Batman* work, he's a classic modern Batman artist, which enables people to lower their guard when they come into the story and then takes them on this really strange journey. The first issue is like a toe in the water, and it gets stronger and stronger as it goes on. It's like having Curt Swan drawing *The Boys*, and it's really fun to subvert people's expectations. I love it. Plus no one draws action like this guy!"



Nemesis is always happy to give someone head.

Night Club, meanwhile, drawn by Juanan Ramirez, centres on a Philadelphia student who is turned into a nocturnal bloodsucker. "Dan Buckley, the president of Marvel, said that I'm the master of the obvious idea, which is a sort of compliment. I like the idea of something so simple that anyone can get it. *Kick-Ass* was a very simple idea: 'What if a kid in real life tried to be a superhero?', as was *Kingsman* – 'What if a kid from the real London tried to be James Bond?'

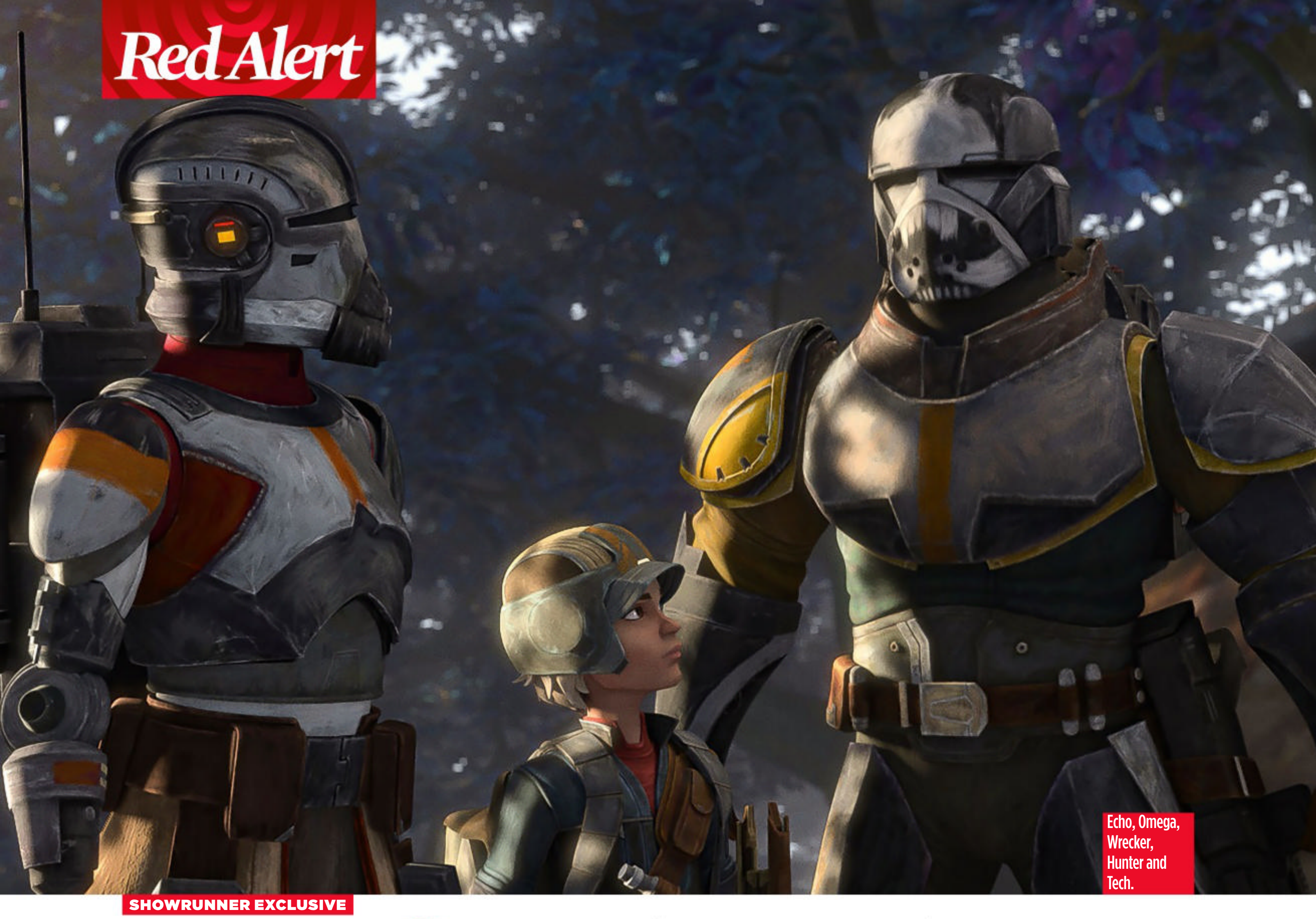
> **"There's something about those chaotic characters that people prefer"**

"With *Night Club*, I liked the simplicity of the idea of a guy who's been bitten by a vampire and is going to use those powers to have a good time as opposed to killing people in alleyways. And making him a superhero made obvious sense, as a vampire essentially has superpowers. They can teleport, turn into mist and hypnotise people and turn into bats, and they've also got their weaknesses, like garlic.

"You can also have great fun with secret identities. He has to be at high school, so what does he do if he can't be in sunlight? So it feels like a Stan Lee story from 1962." **SJ**

Nemesis Reloaded issue one is out 11 January. Night Club is out now.

SCI-FACT! **Millar's 2023 slate also includes soon to be announced projects with Frank Quitely and Travis Charest.**



Echo, Omega, Wrecker, Hunter and Tech.

SHOWRUNNER EXCLUSIVE

My Four Dads

The ragtag soldiers of Clone Force 99 return in **The Bad Batch** season two

EMPEROR PALPATINE doesn't do sentiment. So while his Clone Army was instrumental in defeating separatist forces and all but wiping out the Jedi, the newly formed Galactic Empire is doing its best to create a hostile environment for its lab-grown soldiers.

In the first season of *Clone Wars* spin-off *The Bad Batch*, we saw ordinary humans being conscripted as proto-Stormtroopers, and the cloning facilities on Kamino ruthlessly destroyed by the Empire. For Hunter, Tech, Wrecker and Echo – aka the specialist Clone operatives of the eponymous Batch – the only sensible course of action is to lay low, while working muscle-for-hire jobs for former Jedi informant Cid.

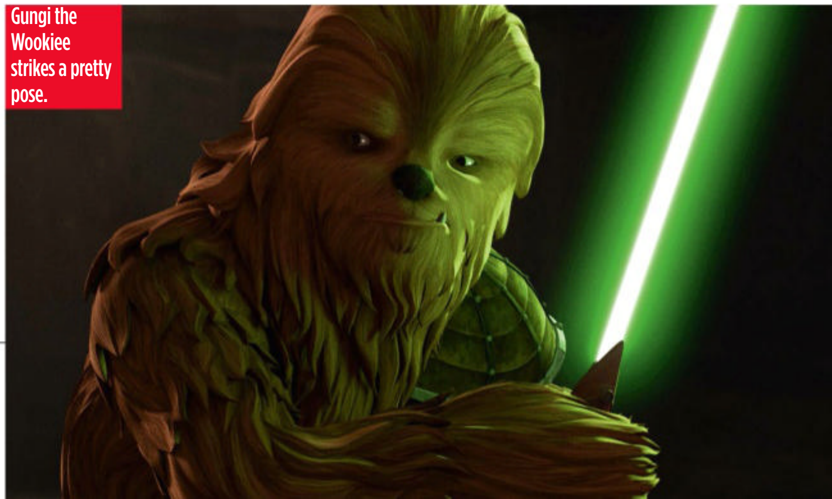
"When we first meet them in season two, a little bit of time has passed," says head writer Jennifer Corbett, reluctant to confirm exactly how long. "The Bad Batch are in an interesting situation right now where they're off the Empire's radar. That is a blessing and a curse, because while they're not, in the beginning, being sought after, how long can they avoid doing missions that attract the Empire's attention?"

"The Empire is everywhere and growing, so that's easier said than done," chips in supervising director Brad Rau. "The Bad Batch are still working for Cid, but they are very careful about what missions they take. They're questioning things."

The Bad Batch is set in the immediate aftermath of the Old Republic consuming the Empire, meaning most citizens of that galaxy far, far away have little idea of the "joys" Palpatine's reign has in store. As Clone Force 99 make their way through the universe, however, it's going to be harder and harder to turn a blind eye to Imperial oppression.

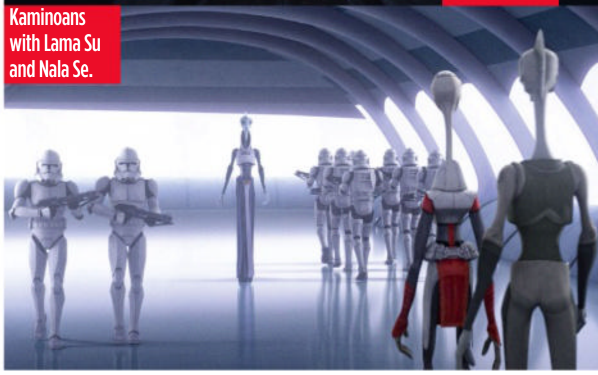
"We're so early into the age of the Empire that I think some planets don't view the Empire as bad," explains Corbett. "But as Clone Troopers, I think the Bad

> "At the heart of it, The Bad Batch is a story about the Clones"

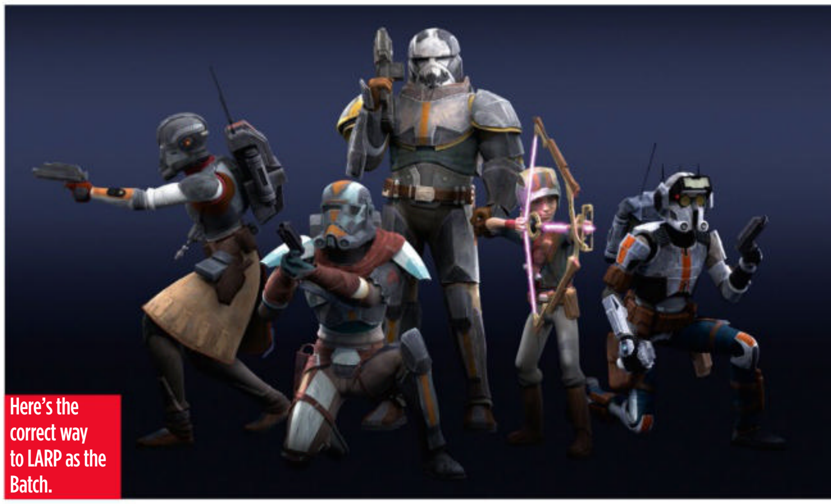


Gungi the Wookiee strikes a pretty pose.

Simon Cowell's had more work done.



Kaminoans with Lama Su and Nala Se.



Here's the correct way to LARP as the Batch.

Batch have a unique perspective on what this new regime is."

In season one, their brother Crosshair stayed fully committed to the Empire, but the Batch aren't ready to give up on their former comrade just yet.

"These are friends who have been through missions together for years," says Corbett, "and who doesn't have a friend they've had a falling out with who they hope they'll see eye-to-eye with again? I don't think they ever want to give up on someone they viewed as a brother."

But despite remaining loyal to the Empire's cause, Crosshair may have to deal with being surplus to Imperial requirements when the show returns.

"It's something we definitely get into in the narrative of season two," explains Rau. "How Crosshair's treated by the Empire, how he feels about that, and how things may or may not change is at the core of some really good episodes.

"At the heart of it, *The Bad Batch* is a story about the Clones," he continues. "As well as the Bad Batch, we deal with the Clones as a whole to see what their fate is. In some ways it's tragic, in some ways it's triumphant, but we wanted to get into all the facets of it."

Unsurprisingly, the show will continue to explore the Bad Batch's relationship with Omega, the young Clone who helped them to escape from Kamino, and subsequently joined their ranks.

"We have so much fun with these tough guy soldiers as the dads of Omega," says Rau. "In season one it was a new thing for them. Now that time has passed, we're seeing how they've settled into those roles as a bunch of dads."

Crucially, the show has yet to explain why the Kaminoans created Omega, a seemingly unique female Clone of Jango Fett, who ages at the standard rate, and wasn't bred for war. "We definitely continue with learning about Omega's background, and the reasons why she was with [cloners] Nala Se and Lama Su on Kamino," Corbett teases. "But the Batch don't care what she is. All they know is that she's their sister, their squad member, and that's it for them."

Omega is also the sister of one Boba Fett – you may have heard of him – and has already had a run-in with the bounty hunter's future partner-in-crime Fennec Shand. Even so, Corbett is quick to shoot down Red Alert's suggestion that Omega might go looking for Jango's most famous son. "Where Boba Fett is at this moment is a *very* different path to Omega's. They're on different journeys at the moment."

It is, however, safe to assume that we'll learn more about the final scene of season one, where Nala Se met an Imperial scientist wearing the same uniform as *The Mandalorian*'s resident geneticist, Dr Pershing.

"That's not a coincidence," confirms Rau, "but I don't want to talk too much about what's going on there. We've got to leave some things in the dark, but we do get into all of that, one hundred per cent." **RE**

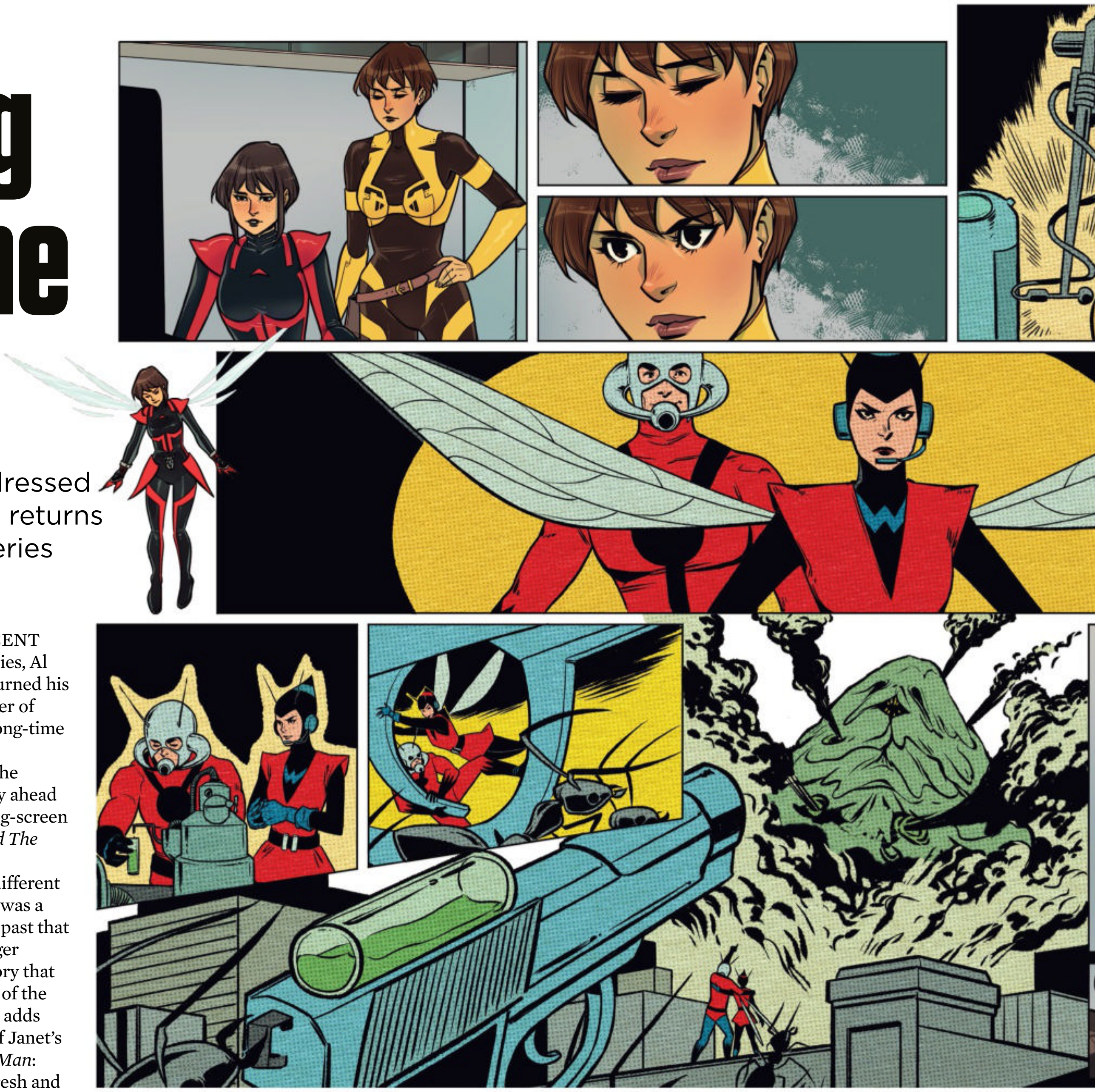
The Bad Batch season two is on Disney+ from 4 January.

SCI-FACT! The cloning facility at the end of season one was Mount Tantiss, mentioned in Timothy Zahn's 1991 novel *Heir To The Empire*.

SCI-FACT! **Created by Stan Lee, Ernie Hart and Jack Kirby, Janet van Dyne debuted in *Tales To Astonish* issue 44 in 1963.**

WRITER EXCLUSIVE

Sting In The Tale



Marvel's best-dressed hero the **Wasp** returns in a new miniseries from Al Ewing

AFTER HIS RECENT *Ant-Man* miniseries, Al Ewing has now turned his attention to original master of many sizes Hank Pym's long-time partner, Janet van Dyne. Illustrated by Kasia Nie, the four-parter arrives shortly ahead of February's release of big-screen blockbuster *Ant-Man And The Wasp: Quantumania*.

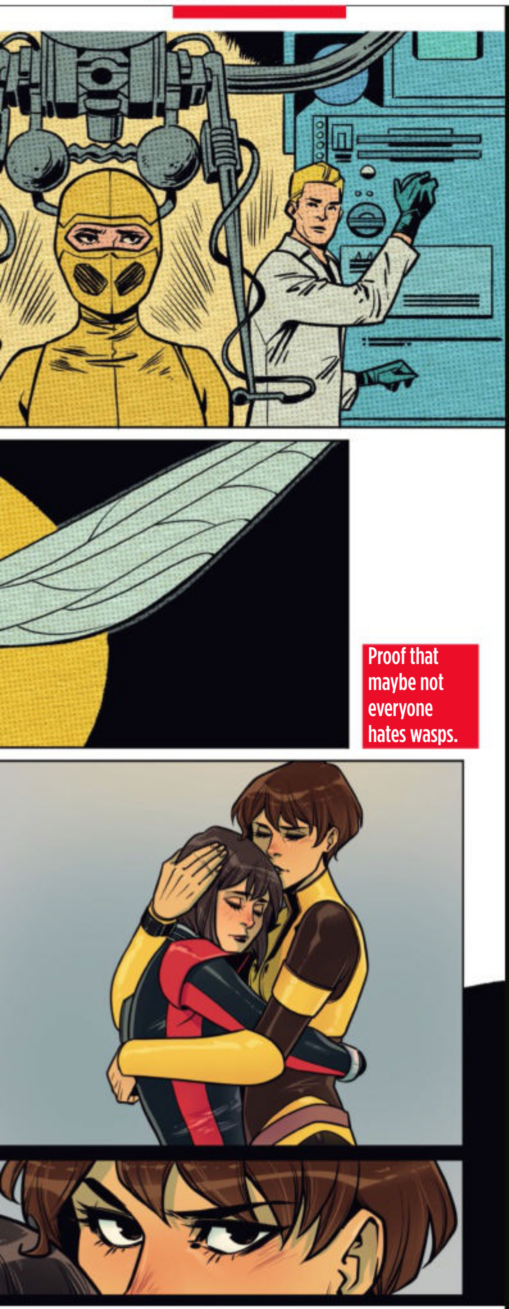
"This book is a subtly different beast, for while *Ant-Man* was a series of stories set in the past that joined together into a larger pattern, this is a single story that references and grows out of the past," explains Ewing. He adds that the series grew out of Janet's guest appearance in *Ant-Man*: "She was very light and fresh and fun to write, and this is a modern Jan who gets to show maybe a harder edge, but that lightness is still in there as well."

While each issue of *Ant-Man* was focused upon a different incarnation of the miniature hero, here Janet teams up with her daughter and fellow Wasp, Nadia van Dyne. "Nadia is much more impulsive than Jan, and doesn't really take time off," says Ewing. "A lot of the times when you see Jan, she's at some function or enjoying her social life, so she's got a very healthy work/life balance. Nadia has no work/life balance, it's all work. But she's also an eternal optimist and absolutely dedicated to achieving the best for everybody. It's fun to put the two of them together and get into the mother/daughter thing."

As a renowned clothing designer who has created outfits for many of her fellow heroes in addition to herself, Janet's impeccable appearance and successful business career will also be emphasised in the series. "We definitely touch on the costumes," says Ewing. "I think this is a very stylish book, as Kasia Nie's art has a certain fashion-plate aspect that's exciting, a sense of poise and style that fits Jan very well. She's also great with some of the more horrific elements – and there are horrific elements at play here!"

Attacked by Whirlwind in the first issue, the Wasps will come up against several familiar adversaries, along with a clandestine secret organisation which has a mysterious link to their past. "Every villain in the book is a villain that Jan and Nadia have encountered before – except one," teases Ewing. "And WHISPER was one of those, as Nadia had a very brief run-in with them very early in her career, after the Maker had abandoned them. What were they up to and what

SCI-FACT! Wanda Maximoff first appeared as a member of the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants in 1964's *X-Men* issue four.


Proof that maybe not everyone hates wasps.

were their goals? We never found out back then, but we will now."

Wasp will reportedly lead into another book from Ewing next year, although he refuses to reveal any details at the moment. "It's no great spoiler that at some point in 2023 there will be a new series from me," he says. "I'm not retiring from Marvel, but until more official announcements are made, I've got to play it a little bit coy as to exactly what that is.

"But I will say that I don't feel like I'm done with Jan after this series, by any means." **SJ**

Wasp issue one is out 18 January.

WRITER EXCLUSIVE

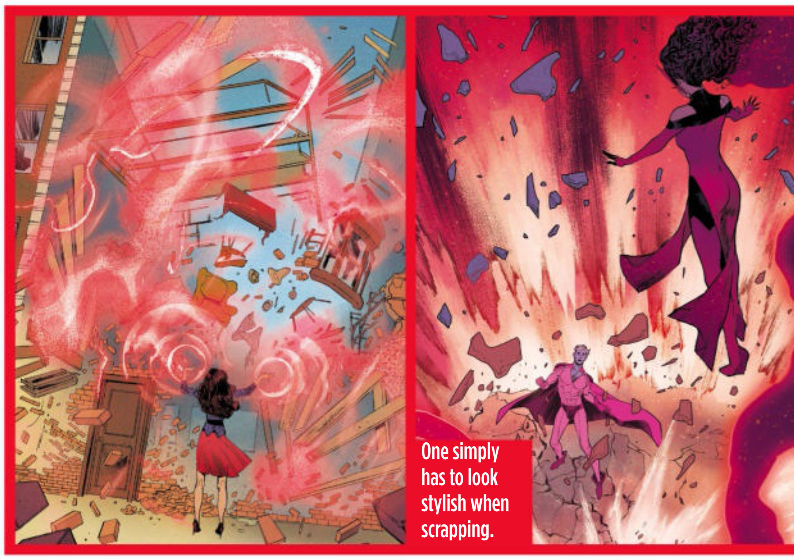
A Twist In The Retail

Wanda Maximoff finds peace as a shopkeeper in Marvel's new **Scarlet Witch** series

PREVIOUSLY haunted by her cataclysmic actions, Wanda Maximoff is in a surprisingly peaceful place at the start of her new monthly series, after literally conquering her demon in 2021's *Darkhold* crossover event.

"Wanda has grown beyond her past mistakes, while not ignoring and still making amends for the pain she has caused," says writer Steve Orlando, who also penned the *Darkhold* Alpha and Omega issues. "She's self-actualised now, with the power to make the impossible possible at her fingertips. And she's finally looking ahead to help as many people as she can, to ensure no-one has to be where she was: at rock bottom, so sure that's she's truly alone – and Wanda has the power to make it so no-one is truly alone."

As one of Earth's Mightiest Heroes, she will also not be confined to mystical realms, venturing out into the wider Marvel Universe from her new base, a witchcraft shop that can only be accessed through the mysterious Last Door. "Wanda will be crashing against Marvel's magic and myth in all new ways through our series," says Orlando. "But perhaps even more fun is pitting Wanda against foes that don't expect her, like the Corruptor in issue one, and Dreamqueen in two.


One simply has to look stylish when scrapping.

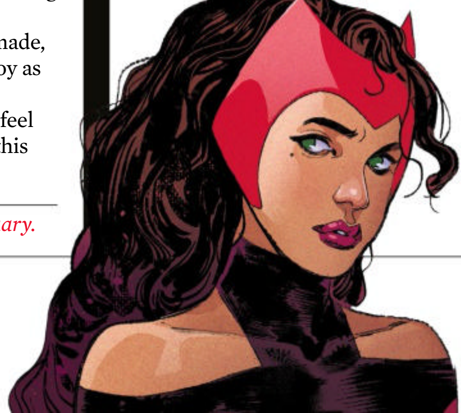
Wanda's skills don't just live in the world of magic. She's an Avenger; she's a superhero.

"There will be many!" Orlando says, as to the adversaries the Scarlet Witch will come up against. "Wanda will be facing all sorts of villains and exploring all sorts of places in the Marvel Universe, such as Sub-Atomica in issue three," he explains, referring to the star system located in the Microverse. "Anyone can step through the Last Door in need of Wanda's aid – they don't need to be from Earth! And at the same time, we'll be threading a mystery through that will explode in Wanda's face should she make it out of Sub-Atomica."

With Orlando teasing that "She's brought a mystery with her that'll string through multiple issues," we will also see the comic book debut of Kat Dennings's MCU character Darcy Lewis, who previously confronted the Scarlet Witch in the *WandaVision* TV series. "Darcy comes to Wanda through the Last Door, but so far she's been reluctant to talk about just what – or who – it is she's been running from," says Orlando, who also promises appearances from those close to the Queen of Chaos. "Quicksilver, Viv Vision and Polaris are already on the schedule, and the longer we get, the more chances we'll get to examine Wanda's relationship with Marvel's other magic users – but that's if she can get through the fistfight she's got with one of them in the first few issues!"

While Russell Dauterman has redesigned Wanda's distinctive crimson outfit, Orlando praises the "effortless innovation" of interior artist Sara Pichelli. "This isn't an easy book to draw, if such a thing even exists! But Sara and [colourist] Matt Wilson build worlds for Wanda with ease, conquering each challenge the story throws at them." **SJ**

Scarlet Witch issue one is out on 4 January.



WRITER EXCLUSIVE

A Life Less Ordinary

Disney's new superpowered show is **Extraordinary**

Máiréad Tyers, Sofia Oxenham and Siobhan McSweeney.

Jen gets caught gulping the milk before paying.

YOUR FAVOURITE SCI-FI magazine is standing inside a giant hangar, hidden away from view in east London. Above us, being hoisted high – so very high – into the air in front of the biggest greenscreen we've ever seen is a handsome actor, preparing to use his flying superpowers for the latest Disney+ show. No, it's not the latest instalment of the MCU – this is "hybrid sitcom" *Extraordinary*.

"The flying is very fun when you're mic'd up to the actors," writer and creator Emma Moran tells us. "You can hear them 50 feet up talking about what kind of sandwiches they like and how massively uncomfortable everything is. It looks really graceful and cool on screen, but they're just hoiked up by their pants, trying to make small talk with each other."

But just because there's flying, this isn't the kind of super-show Disney+ viewers may be used to... "It's a superpower comedy drama set in a world where everyone over the age of 18 has a superpower – apart from our lead character, who's still waiting on theirs and just trying to get through their life," Moran explains of the show.

Originally conceived as part of a writing competition, the script was snapped up by Disney+ back in 2019 when it was pitched to networks. "When I heard 'Disney', I was like, 'Are you sure?'" she laughs, "Because there's some adult content in there..." Moran has no concerns about being part of the home of the MCU, however. "I think it's quite a loving piss-take of it all. But it really does look cinematic. It really has that scale, that sort of nice, superhero-y sheen to it."

So why the superhero inspiration? "It was just everywhere and I kind of hated it," she laughs. "I was like, 'If I see another superhero thing I'm going to throw myself off a bridge.' But I think it is popular for a reason at the minute. Everyone's trying to be the best at stuff and then on top be exceptional, and I think that's why we gravitate towards them. So I sort of wanted to do the opposite of that: what happens when you're just not, and how to be okay with it.

"The way I describe it a lot is that there aren't superheroes in it. There are super*powers* but no heroes, basically. I approached it like if this genuinely happened in real life and everyone got superpowers... Yeah, we have the traditional big-hitters, like flying and making fire and being strong. But also really, really niche ones, like turning anything into a PDF, or putting a USB stick in the right way every single time.

"I took the approach of, 'What is the most banal, selfish way you could possibly use a superpower?' Because if you can turn back time you're going to use it when your girlfriend's like, 'Did you take the bins out?' and you've forgotten. You're probably not gonna go back and stop the Titanic from sinking."

Moran says there are developing arcs throughout the eight episodes – largely focusing on lead character Jen.

"It's about her looking for this power and how she gets it. There's this holy grail clinic that she can go to that will help people like her bring their powers out. It's really how she gets there, how important it is that she does get

Bilal Hasna as Kash and Luke Rollaso as, er, Jizzlord.

> “What is the most banal, selfish way you could possibly use a superpower?”

there, and what she’s willing to neglect or sacrifice in pursuit of this one goal. Ultimately, the stories are more about finding your place in the world.”

That’s not to say the show doesn’t have its fair share of fantastical – and nonsensical – moments. “The scale of it is crazy,” she laughs, thinking about all the absurd things she wrote in her living room now coming to life.

“There’s a bit where a guy that can phase through walls gets stuck, and he can’t take his clothes with him. So he’s nude, his ass is just sticking out of a brick wall. They had to physically build it in the street, so there’d be people walking past looking at this ass sticking out of a wall. It’s fun to go on set and see the ridiculous stuff very serious adults have to make after I write it. It’s a power trip.”

Moran is hopeful for a return visit to the universe she’s created. “It’s such a rich world that I think there’s a lot more to explore in it. It’s set up this quite vast, weird London, and it’d be nice to dig a bit deeper into all of it.”

And has becoming part of Disney given her superpowers of her own?

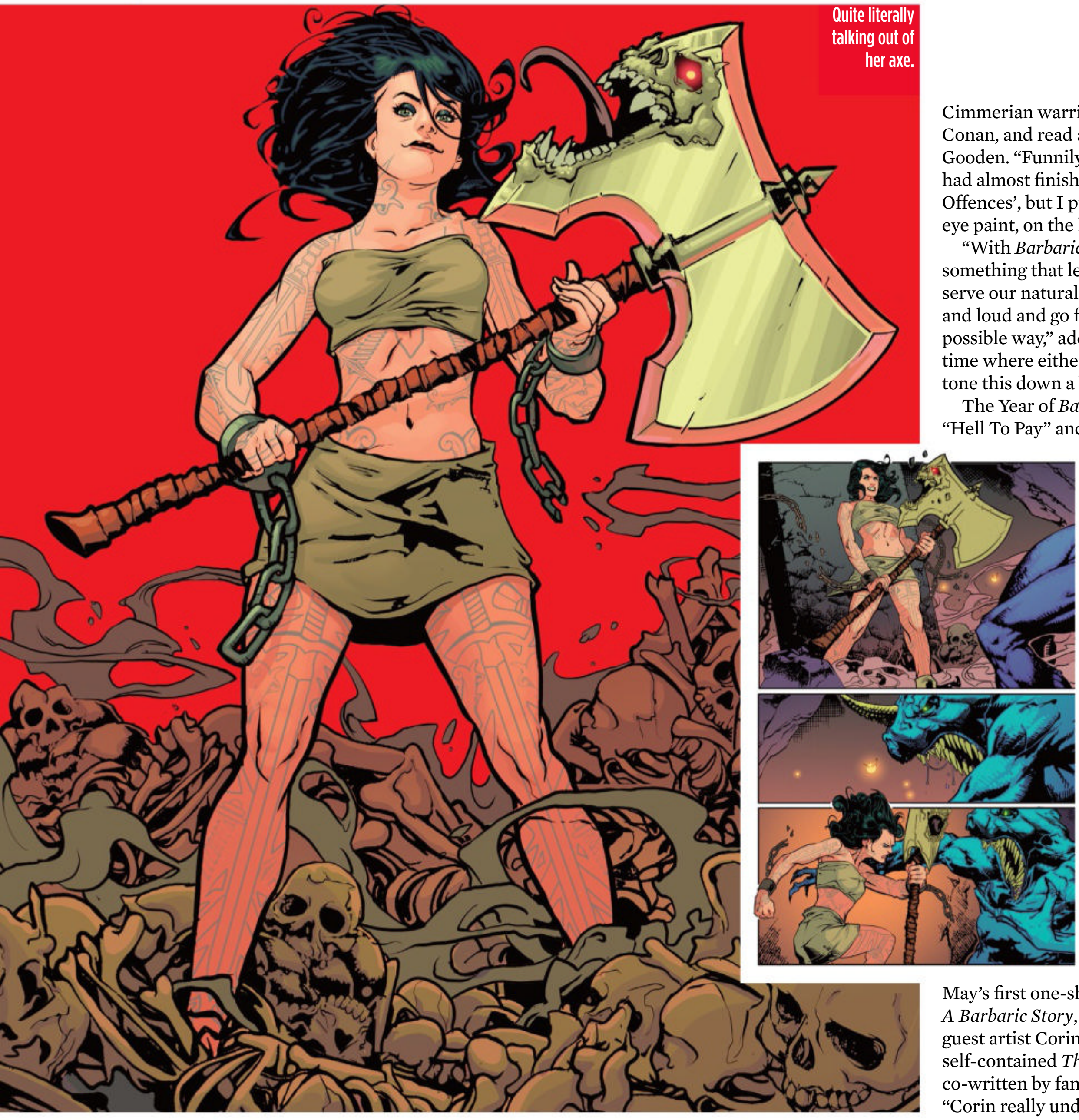
“I can afford nice broccoli, so that’s a tangible thing,” she deadpans. “That’s genuinely made me much happier.” **DS**

Extraordinary is on Disney+ in January.

Carrie and Jen: “We don’t half get up to some tricks, eh?”

SCI-FACT! **Moran says her superpower would be shapeshifting so she didn’t have to go to the hairdresser.**

SCI-FACT! **Conan returns in the summer in a new series from Titan Comics, written by Jim Zub and drawn by Roberto de la Torre.**



Quite literally talking out of her axe.

CREATOR EXCLUSIVE

Kiss My Axe

By Crom! Vault Comics welcomes you to **Barbaric**'s Year of the Axe!

WITH ITS BOMBASTIC ACTION and irreverent humour, writer Michael Moreci and artist Nathan Gooden's *Barbaric* has blazed its own endearing path through the fantasy genre since it was first published by Vault Comics in 2021.

Now Owen the Barbarian, his drunk, talking Axe and their witch ally Soren are set to scale even greater heights in 2023, in what has been proclaimed "The Year of the Axe". "The fans are hungry for more, so we really wanted to deliver in a big way with an entire year of *Barbaric*," Gooden tells Red Alert. "The world is expanding a great deal, with more characters and even another artist to help it grow."

While Owen's acerbic attitude echoes *2000 AD*'s Celtic rogue Slaine, *Barbaric* is actually more influenced by Robert E Howard's Cimmerian warrior. "We were very inspired by Conan, and read a bunch before starting," says Gooden. "Funnily, I didn't find *Slaine* until we had almost finished the first arc, 'Murderable Offences', but I put a little homage, with the eye paint, on the last page."

"With *Barbaric*, we both wanted to do something that lets us play and have fun and serve our natural tendencies, which is to be big and loud and go for the jugular in every possible way," adds Moreci. "There's never a time where either of us says, 'Maybe we should tone this down a bit.'"

The Year of *Barbaric* begins with third series "Hell To Pay" and is bookended by follow-up "Born In Blood". "They're both continuations of Owen, Axe and Soren's adventures together," explains Gooden. "And with that, we really get to see the characters' pasts."

"As much fun as Nate and I have in making this book as crazy, unpredictable and exciting as we can, there is a plan in terms of the narrative," continues Moreci. "We know where we're going and what we want to do, but we also like to get distracted by side quests. If we get an idea for a story and we think it's good enough, we'll run with it, and 'Born In Blood' will be a good example of that."

Those side quests include May's first one-shot, *Queen Of Swords #1: A Barbaric Story*, which will be illustrated by guest artist Corin Howell, and September's self-contained *The Wrong Type Of Righteous*, co-written by fantasy author Nicholas Earnes. "Corin really understands the tone and style of *Barbaric*," says Gooden. "We talk daily, and work together on designs and ideas, which is important as a lot of these characters and storylines overlap."

"It's fitting that Nick came on to join us, because his novel *Kings Of The Wyld* played a huge role in inspiring *Barbaric* in the first place," adds Moreci. "I've found Nick to be one of those daring, bold and hilarious voices that doesn't care about genre convention as much as he cares about telling a good story filled with heart and humour."

"The goal has always been 100 issues, which means lots of new characters and landscapes," adds Gooden. "It goes way beyond Owen and Soren. Their stories might end, but the world will continue to grow." **SJ**

Barbaric: Hell To Pay is out on 18 January.

David Tennant and Catherine Tate: back, back, back!

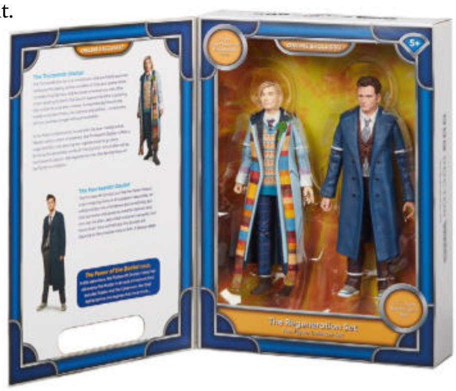
Ncuti Gatwa and Millie Gibson: new, new, new!

Space And Time

Celebrating 60 years of **Doctor Who**

◆ **A new partnership between the BBC and Disney was revealed for the 2023 anniversary specials and beyond. While the series will be shown, as usual, on the BBC in the UK and Ireland, it will be broadcast internationally on Disney+. Lucky old Disney have already seen the specials!**

◆ Character Options has announced the first action figure of the Fourteenth Doctor, as played by David Tennant. The Regeneration Set also includes Jodie Whittaker's Thirteenth Doctor in her forced regeneration "multi-Doctor" costume (see right). You can pre-order the limited set at character-online.com.



◆ ***Doctor Who* Day – aka 23 November – saw the official BBC accounts unveil a new diamond logo to celebrate the 60th anniversary. This was in addition to the new/old, er, diamond logo. And definitely not to be confused with our entirely unofficial one, above.**

◆ Children In Need got the world-exclusive scoop on the new companion as Millie Gibson stepped out of the TARDIS live on BBC One on Friday 18 November. Gibson will play Ruby Sunday alongside Ncuti Gatwa's Fifteenth Doctor.

◆ **It's been reported that 2023 will see three special episodes in November – starring David Tennant as the Fourteenth Doctor and Catherine Tate as Donna Noble – and that Ncuti Gatwa will appear as the Fifteenth Doctor, alongside Millie Gibson, over Christmas.**

◆ Filming officially began for Ncuti Gatwa's first series as the Doctor on 5 December 2022. There will be eight episodes and a Christmas special in 2024.

◆ **A giant multi-Doctor story will play out across 2023 to celebrate the 60th anniversary. Big Finish will release the first of eight hour-long episodes from the *Once And Future* series in May. Tom Baker, Peter Davison, Colin Baker, Sylvester McCoy, Paul McGann, Christopher Eccleston and David Tennant are confirmed to appear, but further guest stars are to be announced.**

Doctor Who is on BBC One and Disney+ in late 2023.

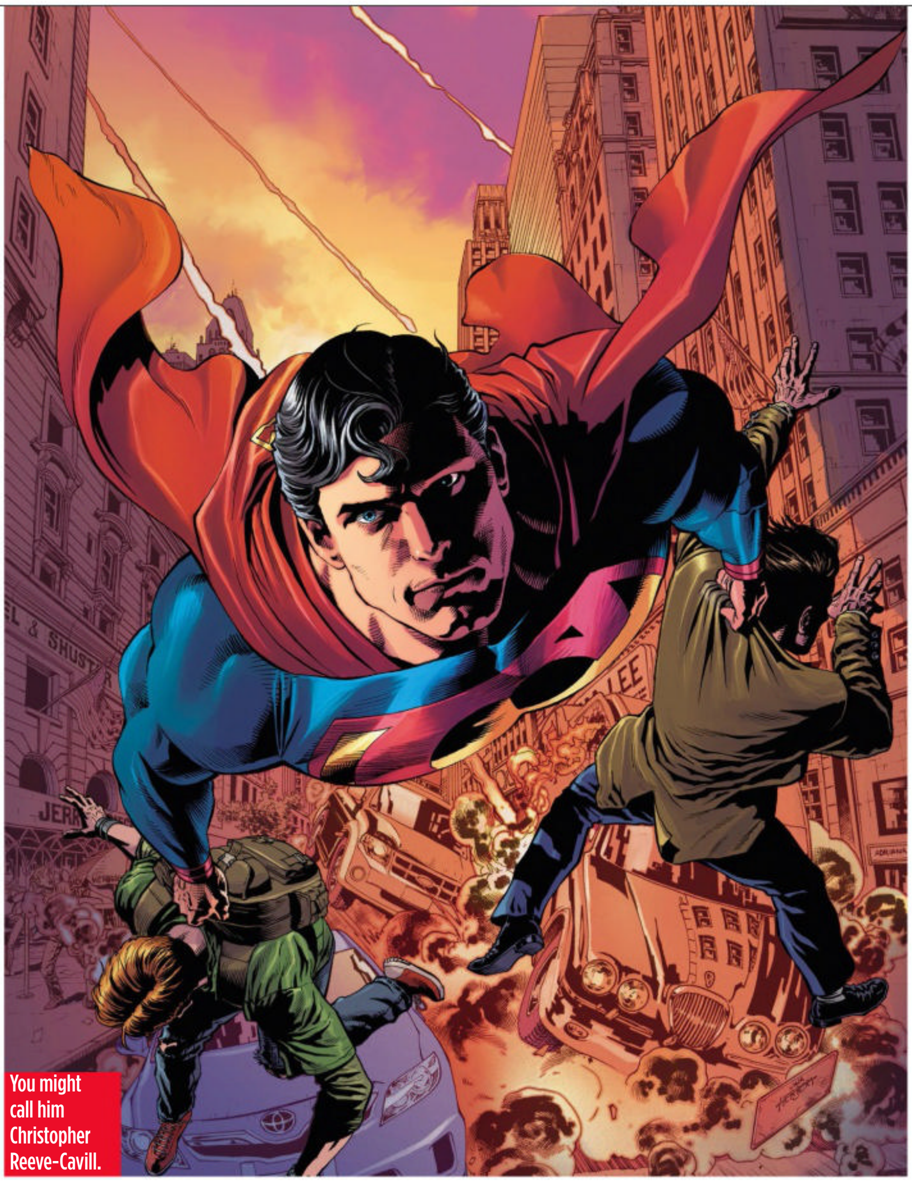
SCI-FACT! **Millie will make her debut over the festive season in 2023, when the Fifteenth Doctor takes control of the TARDIS.**

SCI-FACT! February brings Williamson/Campbell's *Superman* and March Taylor/Henry's *Adventures Of Superman: Jon Kent*.

WRITER EXCLUSIVE

Golden Times

DC's year-long Dawn Of DC initiative begins with **Action Comics**



You might call him Christopher Reeve-Cavill.

USHERING IN A "NEW DAWN OF the DC Universe", *Action* 1051 heralds the arrival of a new beginning for Kal-El, who has recently returned to Earth. Adopting a 48-page format, it harks back to Superman's classic titles as the main narrative will be joined by two back-ups, highlighting characters from the wider supporting cast.

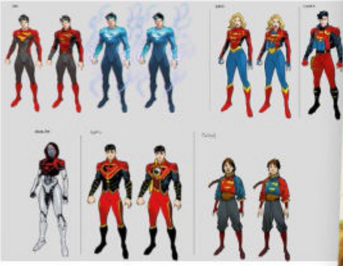
"Clark Kent is still very much the focus of *Action Comics*, and always will be," says writer Phillip Kennedy Johnson, who is joined by artist Rafa Sandoval. "But in the wake of Superman's off-world adventures in *The Warworld Saga*, I saw an opening to pay tribute to the old *80-Page Giants* I grew up on, that told stories about all of the Super Family.

"Superfans have been missing Lois, Kara, Steel, Conner and the others while Superman was away, and with Dawn of DC bringing back a brighter DC Universe, it felt like a great time to bring Superman's family together in a unified mission to save Metropolis and make it a true City of Tomorrow."

DC recently celebrated the 30th anniversary of *The Death Of Superman*, and Johnson will be channelling the collaborative spirit of the period. "What I loved about that era was the singular mission that drove all the Superman books: the fact that the creative teams were aware of what everyone else was doing and worked to keep all the stories working together," reasons Johnson.

"In this new era of Superman stories, I didn't necessarily want the story to pass directly from one title to the next like it used to. Every title will tell its own story and every writer and artist will be working in their own style, but I want the titles to have a feeling of unity."

Describing it as "a landmark reset issue that sets a new status quo in Metropolis and sets the stage for all three Superman series," *Action Comics* 1050 restored Clark Kent and family's secret identities. "*Action Comics* 1051 is the first appearance of the family's new costumes, the first appearance of a new recurring enemy and of the new Metropolis skyline," teases Johnson, who will also explore Superman's hometown.



You'll believe a boy can fly. Left: costume designs.

"Metropolis will go through its own arc in 2023. I love how instantly recognisable Gotham has become over the years, and Metropolis is about to become similarly iconic. It's going to happen organically in ways that serve the story, and it'll be driven by Superman, Steelworks and Lex Luthor. Rafa Sandoval has designed an iconic new addition to the Metropolis skyline, which first appears in 1051."

Johnson will amp up the threat posed by Metallo while riffing off Superman's status as the Man of Steel. "Over the years, there have been countless images of Clark shielding someone from gunfire," he says. "Metallo is a violent man, who was exposed to gun violence as a kid, and he slowly became a living gun through black science. One of the missions of this first arc is to define Metallo forever, and readers will get a much clearer picture of why Metallo, like Luthor, is a perfect foil for Superman." **SJ**

Action Comics 1051 is out on 24 January.

SCI-FACT! Conroy played Bruce Wayne in live-action in *Batwoman* episode "Crisis On Infinite Earths Part Two".

NEW AUTHOR

KATY HAYS

MEET THE ART HISTORY PROFESSOR BEHIND *THE CLOISTERS*

Tell us about your protagonist.

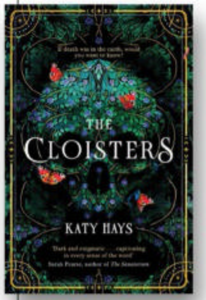
→ Ann Stillwell is an ambitious young college graduate who arrives in New York hoping to work at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, but ends up reassigned to their medieval museum. There she discovers a 15th century deck of tarot cards that may or may not be able to tell the future.

What was the spark for the book?

→ I'm driven by the question: what are we capable of believing? Whether that's tarot cards, ghosts or even our own origin stories. It came from that question. Under what circumstances would you be able to believe that a deck of cards can tell the future? How would that belief reshape your life?

Did you do much research?

→ I enjoy research (it feels like progress without having to do the hard part – write!). I was most surprised to learn that Renaissance aristocrats believed painted depictions of constellations could have fortuitous impacts on their horoscope. No need to wait for Scorpio to move into Venus – just paint it!



Any advice for would-be authors?

→ Push through. Writing is full of self-doubt and disappointment. Your first draft never looks like the book you envisioned writing. But when the story is working there's an alive quality that will come through. Build on that.

What are you working on next?

→ My next project is set in Italy and involves a 30-year-old murder (and maybe a cursed necklace).

The Cloisters is released on 19 January, published by Penguin.

THE FINAL FRONTIER

KEVIN CONROY 1955-2022

He was vengeance, he was the night, he was Batman.

"BATMAN IS NOT THE MASK," argued Kevin Conroy. "Batman is who he really is in his soul." As the voice of the Dark Knight he defined that avenging soul across TV, movies and videogames, earning more credits in the role than any other actor.

Born in Westbury, New York, Conroy attended performing arts conservatory the Juilliard School in the early '70s, rooming with Robin Williams and studying alongside future Man of Steel Christopher Reeve.

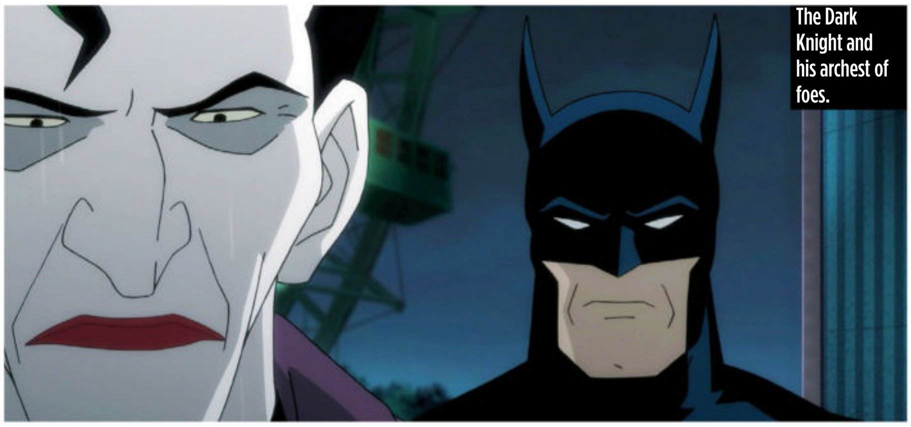
Mixing theatre and television work throughout the '80s – there were high-profile appearances on *Cheers* and *Dynasty* – he was still a relative unknown when he auditioned for *Batman: The Animated Series* in 1992. Conroy only knew of the camp Adam West take on the DC icon, but he saw the possibilities of a darker, more nuanced approach once he discovered the character's bullet-born origin story.

"I said, 'Wow, this is the arc of so many great tragic characters,'" he recalled. "'This is an almost Hamlet-like character, or like the great Greek tragedy characters.'"

Beating 500 rivals to the part, Conroy summoned an intimidating baritone that could be shaded with compassion or deployed as a deadpan foil for comedy. "It put me into a darker and deeper and huskier place, which just sounded to me so mysterious and secretive," he said of his choice of voice. A more colourful upper register characterised Bruce Wayne, the Caped Crusader's billionaire playboy alter-ego, Batman "performing for the world".

For the next three decades you can imagine producers simply flashed the Bat-Signal instead of reaching for the phone. From *Batman Beyond* to *Justice League*, animated movie *Mask Of The Phantasm* to the *Arkham* videogame series, Conroy was the essential voice of Gotham's greatest hero.

"The character really is most alive in animation," he once said, "because people can invest their own imaginations in the character." **NS**



The Dark Knight and his archest of foes.

ALBERT PYUN 1953-2022

American director of *The Sword And The Sorcerer*, *Cyborg* and 1990's *Captain America*.

JASON DAVID FRANK 1973-2022

American actor who played the Green Ranger in *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*.

ALAMY

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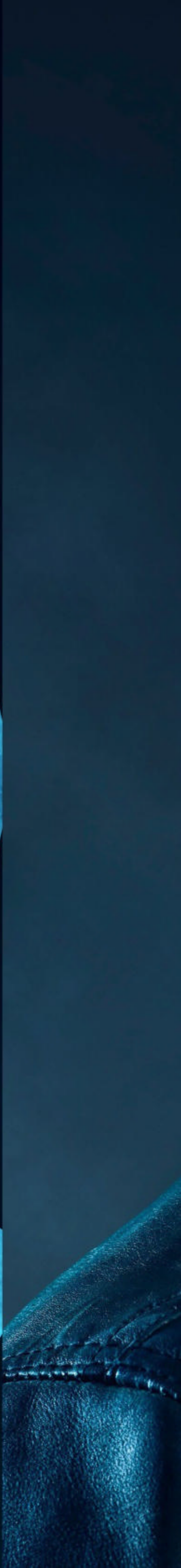
HUNGRY LIKE THE WOLF

GATEKEEPER JEFF DAVIS TALKS
TEEN WOLF: THE MOVIE
AND NEW WEREWOLF TV SERIES
WOLF PACK

WORDS: **BRYAN CAIRNS**



Crystal Reed in *Teen Wolf: The Movie.*

Colton Haynes and Holland Roden.

DON'T GO lumping Jeff Davis's upcoming *Teen Wolf: The Movie* and his TV series *Wolf Pack* in the same universe. This isn't the MCU. Despite both projects revolving around werewolves, *Wolf Pack* is definitely not a *Teen Wolf* spin-off.

"I know that everybody gets confused by it, but I always say, 'Nobody thinks *Twilight* is in the same universe as *Interview With The Vampire*,'" Davis tells *SFX*. "There can be two werewolf shows that exist in separate spaces. It's funny because one of the things we did was consciously try and do things differently with *Wolf Pack*.

"I said, 'I don't want to do the same show. I want to do something more adult, a little bit extreme in places. Not necessarily darker, but a little bit more sophisticated in terms of themes.' *Teen Wolf* was very comic book. It had a real sense of humour... not that *Wolf Pack* doesn't have a sense of humour, but it's not as comedic as *Teen Wolf*."

Ever since *Teen Wolf* wrapped its six-season run back in 2017, the show's fanbase has been howling for a reboot, a revival, a miniseries... quite frankly, anything. That wait will finally end in January when Paramount+ airs *Teen Wolf: The Movie*. *Teen Wolf* creator Davis, who also serves as producer and screenwriter on the film, calls the endeavour "a colossal undertaking. The first cut was three hours long. Part of that is you have so many characters to service. By the end of writing the movie, I kind of realised, 'Oh my god. This is basically season seven all in one movie.' We packed a lot into this movie. It was trying to give the fans big moments, tear-jerking moments and funny moments, while giving them throwbacks to what the show was, but also a few new things like Vince Mattis, who plays Eli, Derek Hale's son."

Set years after the events in the series finale, the movie finds a troubled thirtysomething Scott McCall (Tyler Posey) now residing in Los Angeles. Still struggling to move on in the aftermath of being a hero, Scott has taken up sniffing out shoddy infrastructure in construction sites. Davis says the time shift allowed them "the chance to recalibrate all of these characters".

"The jump ahead allowed me to explore some of the things I went through in my thirties, and questions I have asked myself," he notes. "There's a big moment with Scott, where he is at the animal clinic, and he's wondering what his life is supposed to be if he is not running around with his friends, trying to save the world. Who is he supposed to be now? I like answering those kinds of questions.

"I also like the fact that we jump ahead to give Derek a teenage son," he continues. "I want to see what Derek would be like with a teenager. I wanted to see what all these other characters would be like 10 or 15 years later. That jump ahead in time gives you the chance to recalibrate all of these characters and say, 'What does this character want in their life?'"

But an evil has begun to rise in Beacons Hill. Scott must return to his hometown and rally old friends and new allies against this

It's all kicking off in *Teen Wolf: The Movie.*

"Have you just...?" "Yeah sorry, I'm nervous."

Shelley Hennig plays Malia Tate...

...and Tyler Posey is back as Scott.

malevolent threat. According to Davis, it all starts with Allison Argent (Crystal Reed), Scott's former love, who tragically died back in *Teen Wolf*'s third season.

"What brings them back is incited by Chris Argent [JR Bourne], who has been having these mysterious visions and dreams of his daughter, Allison," Davis says. "There's the idea that his daughter might never have actually crossed over when she died. He finds out that Scott is experiencing the same thing, too. Scott has been seeing her in his mind, in his dreams, and thinking, 'Are these memories or is this something real?' And they keep becoming more and more real to him."

> **"That jump ahead in time gives you the chance to recalibrate all of these characters"**

The movie's teaser trailer features the demonic Oni warriors and the ancient Dark Kitsune known as the Nogitsune. It also suggests that all the heroes might be in mortal peril. Who lives and who dies remains to be seen, but Davis promises that nobody is safe. As for whether there's more *Teen Wolf* story left in the creative well, Davis jokes, "What did Daniel Craig say after that Bond movie? 'I'd rather slit my wrists.' I wouldn't say that, but this was exhausting. Give me a breather."

Continued on page 36...

ALPHA MALE

Tyler Posey on reprising *Teen Wolf* role Scott McCall

After five years, what was it like stepping back into Scott McCall's shoes?

At first, I wasn't sure how it was going to be. I was honestly a little nervous. It's been five years since we had done any *Teen Wolf*. I don't know if many actors get the opportunity to reprise a character that they have played several years ago. It was an odd thing that happened to me. As comfortable as I was playing Scott, I second-guessed it. We didn't have much rehearsal time. We basically got the script. It wasn't even finished because we were rushing it to get it out to the fans as soon as possible and then we were on set immediately. But once they said "Action," it all flooded back to me.

How has Scott changed since the last time we saw him?

The last time we saw him, Scott was the hero of Beacon Hills and went to any length to save his friends, his family, his loved ones and even his enemies. He was this major hero, very methodical and always had a plan of action. When we pick up with him, it's 15 years later and he kind of steps outside of the leadership role and hasn't revisited that in years because he doesn't really need to. He left Beacon Hills, which is obviously the Mecca of all the crazy shit that happens in Scott's life. So, Scott leaving and starting a practice with Deacon in Los Angeles, he's been able to live a normal life. But it isn't his favourite thing.

Scott comes back to Beacon Hills to unite his friends against this new big bad, but what kind of alpha and leader is he?

He's not. He really isn't. He has to step back into that leadership position and figure it out for himself. It's been at least 15 years since we have seen Scott, so he is rusty. But it's like riding a bike, especially for a true alpha. He does step back into it and he wears it well and we see a different side of him. It happens, but it's definitely a journey and the journey is not what you think.

You're an executive producer on this movie. What does that title mean to you?

I love *Teen Wolf* so much. The last few seasons of *Teen Wolf*, I was a producer. I wanted more. I am a ride-or-die for *Teen Wolf*. I am so passionate about the show. I have good ideas. I wanted to give some input. I just care so much that I want to rally for it as much as I can, whether it is doing press, travelling the world and talking to fans or advocating for more *Teen Wolf*.

> “When you first meet her, she’s all business. There’s a huge fire that cannot be contained”

LEADER OF THE PACK

SARAH MICHELLE GELLAR'S RETURN TO THE OTHER SIDE

Many fans are surprised to see you back on a supernatural series. What hooked you about the *Wolf Pack* script?

● Initially, I wasn't even going to even read it. I was like, "It's not my thing. I have done it." It's very hard, because once you have done a show like *Buffy* where it's such a perfect experience and series in what we created, you don't want to do anything that is similar because all that it's going to be is compared to it. Then my team read it and said, "You should just read it because it's really good. It's something that will tug at your sensibilities."

I read it and I realised what they were talking about. What I loved about *Buffy* so much were the metaphors. The monsters were just a metaphor for the horrors of high school. To me, that is really scary. Yes, a monster is scary, but the best supernatural genre thriller is when it tugs on our real experiences. And I hadn't really seen it utilised in that sense until I read this. I got on a call with Jeff Davis and we just talked at length about what the modern horrors are of not just adolescence, but life in general.

Why do you feel monsters have become such successful metaphors for the human experience?

● Because the human experience has gotten extremely scary. Monster stories come from the unexplained. It's how we explain things we don't understand. And it's very hard to understand this world we are living in right now. I don't get the hatred, the anger or the isolation. Just like our ancestors, we use storytelling for answers.

How would you describe your *Wolf Pack* character, Kristin Ramsey?

● I want people to understand it's a slow burn for my character. I don't want people to get frustrated in the first couple of episodes if it seems like I am on the periphery. That's all there for a reason. When you get to episode eight, it all gets explained. I can only liken it to *The Sixth Sense*, where you get to episode eight and you realise all of the clues that were there, that nobody saw throughout. People will go back and rewatch it and go, "Oh, that's why that happened. I get it." Things that might seem minor might be bigger clues to who I am and why I am there.

When you first meet her, she's all business. There's a huge fire that cannot be contained. Her one drive, when you first meet her, is to get to the bottom of this fire, once it is established it was arson, and why somebody would do something like that.

You also serve as an executive producer on *Wolf Pack*. What's it like being on that side of the camera?

● It's only been the last couple of years that has been important to me. One, I do have a lot of experience. As an actor who works on that side of the camera, you have a different lens – pun intended – of how you see things. Luckily, I see both sides of it. I have a very production-minded mind. I am good with numbers, which a lot of actors aren't, but I always have been.

It also gives me the ability to protect the younger cast in a way that is now always there. There was not a system set up in my day for the younger actors to feel protected and to have someone to go to. It's a system that I think is really important and that I put in place from day one.

Sarah Michelle Gellar as Kristin Ramsey in *Wolf Pack*.

"Godamnit, I need answers and I need them *now*!"

How would you sum up your *Wolf Pack* experience? How excited are you to see where it goes for a second season?

● Decisions for me now are so different than 10 years ago. I have two children. If I am going to be away, whether it's travelling or just working long hours, it has to be something I am passionate about, something that is a good experience and with people I like to work with. This is that reminder that I love what I do and that I love the people that I get to work with.

Everything old seems new again. Now that there has been that distance, how open would you be to participating in something *Buffy*-related?

● I'm not. I am very proud of the show that we created and it doesn't need to be done. We wrapped that up. I am all up for them continuing the story, because there's the story of female empowerment. I love the way the show was left: "Every girl who has the power can have the power." It's set up perfectly for someone else to have the power. But like I said, the metaphors of *Buffy* were the horrors of adolescence. I think I look young, but I am not an adolescent!

LONE CUB

Armani Jackson details his inauguration into *Wolf Pack*

Introduce us to Everett.
He's your typical teenager with a bit of anxiety. He doesn't have a lot going on in his life. His parents aren't the most caring. He deals with a lot of different health issues. One day, he's on his school bus and he's caught in the middle of a wildfire and gets bitten by a supernatural creature. At first, it's the last thing he would want to happen. But slowly, this mystery is forcing Everett to become more mature and a more confident human – or half-human.

There's a lot going on in the California wildfire scene. How was it filming that?
That was one of the first scenes we filmed. It was very hot. It was 100 degree [Fahrenheit, 37 Celsius] weather. We were in a bus that did not have a lot of AC. It was cool to film that scene, because it's arguably one of the most action-packed sequences. And it was a lot of CGI, it was a lot of movement and a lot of blocking. It definitely took a long time, but it was probably my favourite scene to film.

What's it been like filming against a CG werewolf?
Off the bat, we didn't originally know what we were supposed to be looking at. They might not even have had a rendering for us to see. We were working off an explanation of how tall this thing was supposed to be, how scary it was supposed to look. Then, as shooting went on, the VFX guy would start to show us some shots of what it looked like. In the scene, it would usually be a tall guy in a grey suit with a werewolf head over his neck, which was really funny to look at.

Were you curious about how far they would go into the transformation involving Everett?
They kept us pretty in the dark about it. We weren't really sure when we got the roles if we would be running through the woods naked or if we were going to be all CGI, or if we weren't even going to look like ourselves. We got the scripts very slowly too, so we were figuring this out as we went. But I was very excited to see my eyes glow red.

The local cops aren't impressed in *Wolf Pack*.

Too bad Davis doesn't have that luxury. His TV series *Wolf Pack* also premieres the same day courtesy of Paramount+. Davis admits that when the streaming service approached him to act as showrunner on yet another project involving teens and werewolves, he needed some convincing.

"What drew me in, eventually, was the ties to environmentalism, the whole idea of placing it against the backdrop of a California wildfire and the struggles that teens are dealing with today – and people in their twenties – with anxiety, depression and lack of connection because of social media and technology," explains Davis. "Those were themes that really interested me. I always gravitate towards genre in order to tell these deeper, more meaningful stories... Not just scare you, but cut in the psychology behind the fears."

Based on the Edo van Belkom novel of the same name, *Wolf Pack* follows Everett (Armani Jackson) and Blake (Bella Shepard), two teenage students bitten by a supernatural creature in the midst of a California wildfire. The two are soon inexplicably drawn to Luna (Chloe Rose Robertson) and Harlan (Tyler Lawrence Gray), siblings that have been cursed with being werewolves.

"There is a group of four teenagers, who are bound together," Davis elaborates. "Two are bitten and two are born. The way they navigate, realising they are now a pack that has to work together, is much of what the first season encapsulates. I think there's a foundation of mystery. There is the mystery of who set the fire. There is the mystery of what creature turned these kids and what creature is still out there hunting people.

"Then there are the two adult heroes that we have in the form of Garrett Briggs [Rodrigo Santoro], who is the adopted father of Harlan and Luna, who are the two born wolves," he continues. "Then there is the hero figure in Sarah Michelle Gellar's character, the arson investigator Kristin Ramsey, who comes in trying to solve this crime and finds herself in a very strange world of unusual things happening that she doesn't quite have the answers for."

Nabbing genre icon Gellar should be considered a coup. The *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* actress hasn't ventured into supernatural territory – let alone as a regular in live-action television – for quite a while. So even Davis was stunned when she agreed to come on board.

"The conversations were me saying, 'Sarah Michelle Gellar? We are never going to get Sarah Michelle Gellar,'" he recalls. "'She hasn't done a show like this in years. There is no way she's going to jump into this again knowing the legacy of *Buffy* and that she was the star of one of the best genre shows ever.' Then we met and we clicked. She really liked the script. I'm just as surprised as anybody else that she said yes.

Things are getting a bit smokey in California.

"So... anyone going to do the werewolf joke?"

"Also, just as surprised, and delighted as well, that she is such a great person to work with," he adds. "Sarah is not just an actor on the show. She's an executive producer as well. It's not a vanity title for her. She takes the role very seriously and she's been involved in a lot. Not only have I gotten a great actor and star for the show, but a producing partner as well, which has been a huge advantage for us."

As to whether Davis had a contingency plan if Gellar turned them down, he notes, "We had a lot of people on a list. The studio wanted a star. [*Yellowstone* co-creator] Taylor Sheridan has done very well with stars. He has an amazing capacity to lure them into his Westerns. It's a little harder for us because we are doing a show about teen werewolves. How many stars really are left?"

Teen Wolf produced 100 episodes and if Davis has his way, *Wolf Pack* will follow the same trajectory. The pilot hasn't even aired and the writers' room is already buzzing over season two and the narrative possibilities.

"As you are doing the first season and setting up all these threads, you always start thinking a little further down the line... but nothing too concrete, yet," Davis concludes. "If enough subscribers sign up, if enough people watch, then we will get serious about it." ●

Teen Wolf: The Movie and Wolf Pack are on Paramount+ from 27 January.

MOON KNIGHT

Dylan Sprayberry on returning to *Teen Wolf*

Where do we find Liam in the movie?
Liam, for reasons that are important to the storyline, has made a big shift in his life and started a new part of his life with his girlfriend, Hikari [Amy L Workman]. He's been separated from the pack for a long time. While I believe that Liam and the rest of the pack kept in contact here and there, I don't think there's been a lot of mass communication between him and the group. In the movie, you are seeing Liam integrate back into the wolf pack.

How does Liam feel when Scott shows up on his doorstep?
It's mixed emotions. He's excited to see his alpha, who is essentially a big brother and someone who completely changed his life back when the bite first happened. It's this deep feeling of gratitude to see someone that he loves and cares about so dearly. But also, Liam knows he wouldn't be seeing Scott unless something really bad was happening.

Liam is a fighter and a physical character. How much action can we expect to see with him?
For sure, in the movie, Liam gets a lot of action. That was really fun for me. I have been working on a few things since then, but nowhere near the amount of action I got to do on *Teen Wolf*. I grew up doing martial arts. It was fun to get to implement something I know on the show, and honestly, we got to improve it this time around and got to do some really great stunts.

As a werewolf, Liam often bares his fangs and lets a howl loose. Did you draw inspiration from any source?
I've listened to a lot of Hugh Jackman interviews. Especially being somebody who is playing half-animal/half-human, Hugh's example of the way he took Wolverine and brought him to life was a big inspiration for me. Seeing the behind-the-scenes of all that stuff with him on set and doing the ADR, it really let me know you have to go all-in. Every time you fight, you are doing the roar. Every time you're roaring, it's a real roar. You're not faking it. I don't care if you lose your voice. I don't care if you can't talk the next day. You're going for it!

IT'S ALL FUN AND GAMES

THE BELOVED NAUGHTY DOG VIDEOGAME THE LAST OF US GETS ADAPTED AS A BIG-BUDGET TELEVISION SERIES

WORDS: **TARA BENNETT**

NAME A VIDEOGAME you've played that gave you goosebumps, made you sweat with tension *and* then sob because the story broke your heart? Not a big list to choose from, right?

One of the few to tick all those boxes is Naughty Dog's post-apocalyptic hit *The Last Of Us*. A third-person survival/adventure game set in an America ravaged by a virulent fungus, it was released in 2013 and went on to win a myriad of awards, spawn a sequel, and now an HBO series co-created by game creator Neil Druckmann with Craig Mazin, the award-winning creator of the HBO series *Chernobyl*.

What really set the game apart was how uniquely the developers cultivated a narrative that invested players in the two primary heroes: the adult, world-weary Joel, and Ellie, the angry and abandoned 14-year-old girl who is seemingly immune to the fungal brain infection that has wiped out, or mutated, so much of humanity. Sure, the game has plenty of puzzles and monster-slaying, but it's their journey and their connection that elevated it to another level.

Knowing the power of the characters and world of *The Last Of Us*, Druckmann spent a few years trying to turn the property into a movie, with no success. "There was too much story to condense into two hours," Druckmann tells *SFX* in a call from his office.

With the project stuck in development hell, it wasn't until he watched *Chernobyl*, which was also a dark thriller that focused on its characters, that another path became clear. Setting up a lunch meeting with showrunner Craig Mazin, Druckmann just point blank asked him: "Could we make this into a TV show at HBO?"

As it turns out, Mazin was already a fan of the game, having played it on its initial release. "In my mind, I could only imagine it as some sort of long-form narrative," he tells *SFX*. Having just completed a very successful limited series, he saw a shorter season format as the best model for pitching *The Last Of Us* to HBO, and the network agreed.

Pedro Pascal as Joel: his bark's worse than his bite.

Ellie and Joel discover a remnant of the past.

> **"Everything we did is clearly connected to the soul and spirit of the game"**

In early 2020, the series went into pre-production. Of course, the irony wasn't lost on Druckmann and Mazin that they were crafting a series about a virulent pandemic while the world was in the midst of the Covid outbreak. And they weren't the only ones, as other series with pandemic storylines, like *Sweet Tooth*, *Station 11* and *Y: The Last Man*, were also getting made. Unperturbed by the trend, the two say they knew that what no other show had was Joel and Ellie.

Of course, while the pandemic was something alarmingly novel for contemporary society, it's nothing new in human history. "When we made the game, pre-pandemic, we studied the Spanish flu," Druckmann says. "For us, [the fungus] is just an excuse to put characters under pressure, and create interesting relationships.

"This story is less about that outbreak, and more about how Joel and Ellie deal with the ramifications of that outbreak, and this wonderful cast of characters around them. They show the different permutations of how the panic and love that people feel can be a wonderful thing, or a horrible thing." Mazin adds, "We just stayed true to what we think would make the best show."

In breaking the game's story into a workable television series arc, Mazin says they benefited from having the very rare combination of two different perspectives in the same writers' room: the person who made the game and somebody who loved the game. Of course, the structural requirements of TV forced them to think outside of the boundaries of the game's narrative. "In a series, we have beginnings and endings," Mazin explains. "Every single episode begins and ends. When you're playing the game, you decide where you exit."

In focusing on the plot and character essentials they wanted to carry over into the series, Druckmann says they started off with moments of which they couldn't imagine a better version to keep "as is".

"Then we asked, 'What are the things that are hinted at by characters talking about events that we couldn't show in the game, which meant Joel and Ellie couldn't see them?'" he continues. "'Could we build a scene out and dramatise those events, that are purely exclusive to the show?'

"Working with a great storyteller like Craig, I asked what are things that were inspiring to him from the original content, that we could add to the story? All those things felt like they enriched the world and the characters.

"We didn't get hung up on any one moment, or thing, where we felt like fans would just have to have this," he adds. "Every time we took one of those points, we were like, 'Should this go in? Should this other idea go in? What is the best idea for this story in this medium?' And those ideas won."

For Mazin, some of the joys of digging into the adaptation were in finding the transition moments between scenes and highlighting the contrasts between characters. "Like, maybe there's a moment where Joel and Ellie have two minutes to just sit and wait, so what do they talk about?" he says. "We hope that people that watch the show appreciate where we take that, because it's entirely curated."

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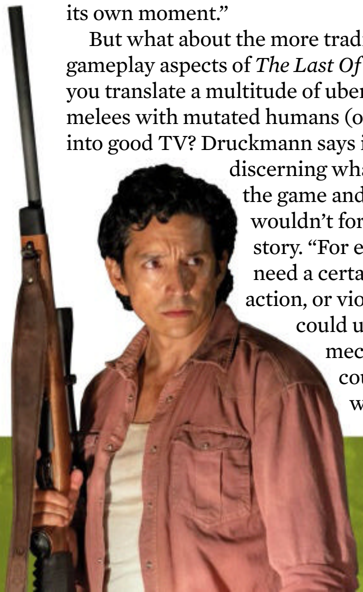
Merle Dandridge as Marlene, Joel's frenemy.

Anna Torv plays Joel's smuggling partner Tess.

Ellie and Tess have a moment's peace.

He says he's excited for fans of the videogame to be "startled" by what the show adds to the mythology. "And not because it's wildly different than the game, or violates the game or breaks it, but because it just wasn't in it. Everything we did is clearly connected to the soul and spirit of the game. And if you tell something honestly and beautifully, you will find one little thing – even if it's the twitch of an eye, or the slightest change of a look – that adds something to that moment and it will be its own moment."

But what about the more traditional gameplay aspects of *The Last Of Us*? How do you translate a multitude of uber-violent melees with mutated humans (or "Clickers") into good TV? Druckmann says it was all about discerning what works for the game and what wouldn't for a live-action story. "For example, we need a certain amount of action, or violence, that we could use for mechanics so you could connect with Joel and get into a flow state," he says of the videogame. "Then you would really feel like you're connected with this on-screen avatar and you're seeing the world through his eyes.



"But that doesn't exist in a passive medium. One of the things that I loved hearing from Craig and HBO very early on was, 'Let's take out all the violence except for the very essential.' That allowed the violence to have even more impact than in the game, because when you hold on showing the threat and you're seeing people's reaction to a threat, that makes it scarier. And when we do reveal the infected and the Clickers, you get to see what brought down humanity and why everyone is so scared."

Once they had their approach to the story for the series worked out, they focused on the other pivotal stage: casting. "Joel and Ellie as a unit were essential," Mazin emphasises. "We needed to know who they were."

Pedro Pascal was sent the script in hopes of him playing Joel. "He read it immediately and we had an incredible conversation," Mazin says. "I remember talking to him thinking, 'There he is. It's happening already. He is Joel.' So he was [cast] first."

"Ellie took longer because it's a harder role to cast," Mazin continues. "We're trying to cast a 14-year-old girl and acting is an incredibly difficult thing to do, right? It's an easy thing to do terribly. It's a hard thing to do okay. But it's a really, really hard thing to do brilliantly. And children haven't had that much life experience. It's hard to find kids that can embody this."

Mazin notes that adult actress Ashley Johnson originated the role in the game, and brought her age and experience to Ellie. "Now we're looking for a child, or somebody that can convincingly portray a child, who has this preternatural wisdom with this impossible combination of youth and experience," he says of their predicament.

"Plus, she needs to be funny, tough, violent and protective of herself. She also needs to make us believe that she's going to have this connection with Joel, so it took longer. We saw over 100 people."

PLAGUE ONE

Then Bella Ramsey, of *Game Of Thrones* fame, auditioned. "The only fear that I had was because I watched her audition before Neil did, I was panicked that he wouldn't like it and I would have to live for the rest of my life knowing that we couldn't have the best Ellie ever," Mazin laughs.

"But happily, he loved her. And we couldn't have done better. She's just the most remarkable performer."

What worried Druckmann was how Pascal and Ramsey would work together. "I feel like I got so lucky with Troy Baker and Ashley," he says of his game actors. "Could we capture that again? But then seeing them interact, there was nothing to worry about. It immediately fell into place and that chemistry was there. With Pedro taking her under his wing and the connection they had, we got lucky again."

The duo are confident even the most ardent fans of the game will be wooed by their TV cast's interpretation of the characters– even some of the early naysayers. "Sometimes people say what we want is for the characters to look exactly like they did in the game. But that's not really what they want," Mazin says.

"They want fidelity. When you haven't seen a show, when you haven't had a chance to view the characters and all you have is an image, of course that's your only ability to judge the fidelity. But once you get into it and you've been under the hood, you will start to feel this other fidelity that matters more.

"I don't begrudge anybody their hesitation or concern. I think all of that is just a reflection of how much they loved *The Last Of Us*. But we are going to reward their patience and win them over through our love." ●

The Last Of Us is on Sky Atlantic and NOW from 16 January, and HBO in the US.

GHOST P

WHO YA GONNA CALL? JOE CORNISH SUMMONS LOCKWOOD & CO TO TV

WORDS: **NICK SETCHFIELD**

NETFLIX, GETTY

JOE CORNISH IS HAUNTED. NOT BY ANY BONE-chilling apparition or plate-flinging poltergeist but by a time. A vanished age, of strange torments and diabolical dread.

"This is a world of draughty houses and windows that don't quite close properly and creaky floorboards and clicking pipes," he tells *SFX*, smiling over a Zoom connection. "The world I remember from my childhood, before double-glazing and insulation!"

Welcome to the phantom-infested Britain of *Lockwood & Co*. It's a little like the 1970s, only even weirder. Adapted from the popular series of books by Jonathan Stroud, this new Netflix offering pits swashbuckling teens against the unquiet dead in a London spilling over with paranormal activity. Even the local A-Z, you strongly suspect, drips with ectoplasm.

ANATOMY OF A GHOST

"I love supernatural stories," says Cornish, who serves as lead writer and director on the eight-part series, "and it's unusual to find a story where the science of ghosts has been so thoughtfully defined. There's a broad set of rules for ghosts that most stories adhere to, but there's not really an almost Darwinesque analysis of different types of ghosts, different species, different behaviours, a *taxonomy*.

"The idea that they can kill you by touching you completely changes the dynamic of a ghost story, brings it into the action-adventure realm. So you get everything great about a ghost story but these other genre elements really take it into a new place.

"On top of that you've got terrific worldbuilding. This takes place 50 years into a ghost epidemic, and the world has really changed because of it. Different economics and different social structures have emerged. Because young people are more sensitive to the supernatural, which is a classic trope in ghost stories, it's extrapolated into this world where young people are employed by massive adult-run agencies to detect and fight ghosts.

"So it's a pretty amazing bit of thinking, based on a very attractive set of genre ideas that have been around for ages →

ROTOCOL

"Come with me…" "Um, actually, I'm alright, ta."

Sometimes it's better to keep things bottled up.

but have never really been reinvented in such a clever way."

It's a more analogue world, where technological progress stuttered. And that's a premise that appeals to Cornish, who made his name with the hand-tooled, micro-budget joys of *The Adam And Joe Show* – a pioneering '90s celebration of geek culture, knocked together from toys, love and cardboard – before promotion to the big screen as director of *Attack The Block* in 2011.

"The world changed tack when the problem started, because everything that would be regarded as pseudo-science became real science," he explains. "So the world stopped at the time of Amstrad word processors!

"It became a more industrial world, because iron and salt and water can repel ghosts, so suddenly these almost Victorian industries are revived. Also, in a weird parallel way, old things are suddenly scary. Anything with an ancient history is potentially lethal, because it might be the source of a ghost.

"For me it felt like the early '80s, when I was a teenager, because that was kind of pre-digital. It was a world that still had analogue media and you could buy records and fanzines. There was a world of printed youth culture that existed in a social way, that wasn't on telephones and computers. You communicated in a much more person-to-person way back then. So that was pleasing for me as well – the series has this kind of retro-contemporary feel to it that's half modern and half 50 years ago."

The spectral aesthetic in *Lockwood & Co* also takes inspiration from the past. "We started by looking at Victorian spirit photography. Because photography is pre-digital, it's chemical, the ghosts feel very different, like a real physical presence. They feel as if they exist in the world of natural physics – we can't really get away with hiding them.

"In other movies or TV shows you might glimpse a ghost as a jump scare and then it's gone. Our ghosts are really present, and our characters fight with them, so we had to come up with a design that you could really train the camera on, and involve in an action sequence, and would be able to leap around and dive and swoop and bolt into a corner.

"They're all made out of smoke, they're all made out of something ethereal. There are lots of different types in the series, lots of colours and densities and shapes. We tried to get away from super-digital ghosts and make them feel like they could really exist in a science experiment."

Lockwood & Co looses its phantoms in some genuinely creepy abodes. What's the secret of bringing a legitimately goosefleshing haunted house to the screen?

"We worked really hard on lighting, and light levels, making sure stuff was legible enough but that you're also slightly peering into the shadows. I think sound is hugely important, and also silence. A lot of modern media is frightened of silence and when nothing happens that's often the most interesting moment. We tried not to do too many jump scares. We do one or two, but we try and create an atmosphere of creeping fear rather than give people heart attacks."

Stroud's five-novel Lockwood series launched with *The Screaming Staircase* in 2013 (the TV version adapts this tale but also goes beyond it, Cornish reveals). Its young ghostbusters are Lucy Carlyle, gifted with psychic powers, and Anthony Lockwood, the dashing and enigmatic founder of the only agency to operate without adult supervision. The show captures the dashing spirit of the books, quippy heroes slicing at wraiths with rapiers, but plays things commendably straight.

"It's a very sincere endeavour," acknowledges Cornish. "We believe in the characters and we believe in the world. Stuff like this only works if you really commit to it and decide that it's real. I don't love shows where the characters are winking at the camera, or there are meta jokes. I want the world to be completely absorbing and credible.

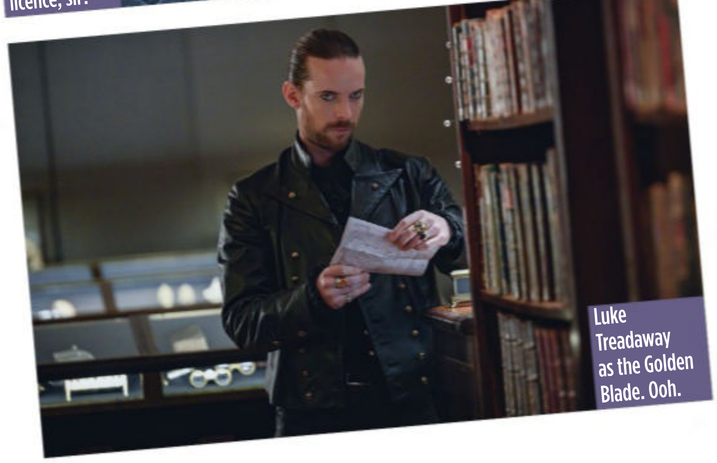
"One of the most important and compelling things for people who love these books is the relationship between Lockwood and Lucy. It's a relationship that has an enormous fandom – there's an amazing amount of fan art out there. It's a sort of unrequited will-they-won't-they relationship. This is a world where young

NETFLIX, GETTY

> “Stuff like this only works if you really commit to it and decide that it’s real”

Lucy and Lockwood get into a spot of trouble.

“Can I see your ghost-hunting licence, sir?”



Luke Treadaway as the Golden Blade. Ooh.

people shoulder an incredibly grave burden, at a time in their life when they shouldn’t be thinking about death, or mortality, all the things that older people have to think about, and yet here they are, armed with weapons, having to fight things that could kill them.

“But then another brilliant thing about the novels is that if you get too depressed you get more vulnerable, so the ghosts can get you if you feel too bleak. So they have to cheer each other up and make quips and jokes, for safety purposes. We just approached the whole thing as if it was completely real.”

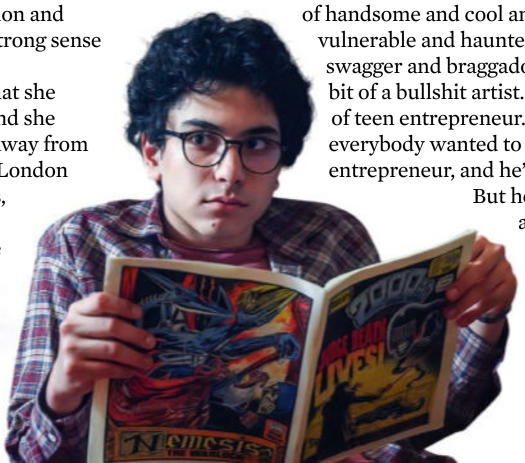
Given the rabid fandom, getting the casting of the leads right was crucial. *Bridgerton*’s Ruby Stokes ultimately won the role of Lucy.

“She’s the centre of the story,” Cornish tells *SFX*. “She’s vulnerable, damaged, kind of abused and exploited as a child, comes from a broken home, has lost her father, yet has incredible gumption and ambition and a very strong sense of self-preservation.

“She has this gift that she really doesn’t want, and she packs her bags, runs away from home and sets out to London with no qualifications, nowhere to stay the night. Her powers are an expression of her emotional sensitivity. In the book it’s like teenage emotions are being made into a supernatural power.

“So we just had to find an incredible young actor who felt like she could do it, and who you believed had that inner emotional life. Before I did this I always wondered how castings worked, whether there was some super-complicated methodology. But a person just walks into the room and you go, ‘Do I believe that she’s Lucy?’ Ruby was actually one of the first people we saw, and we all just went, ‘Oh, there she is! There’s Lucy Carlyle!’”

Newcomer Cameron Chapman bagged the title role. “Lockwood was much harder, actually,” shares Cornish. “We saw hundreds and hundreds of actors, and Cameron came in pretty late in the day, at the eleventh hour. And that’s equally hard, because he’s got to be sort of handsome and cool and yet really vulnerable and haunted. He’s got to have swagger and braggadocio but also be a bit of a bullshit artist. He’s like a sort of teen entrepreneur. In the ’80s everybody wanted to be a teen entrepreneur, and he’s that made flesh. But he’s also wounded and secretive and has sort of a death wish.



“Cameron had all that. Weirdly, he looks very like the illustrations on the book covers, and he wears that long coat really well. He does the charisma, he does the vulnerability, he’s a bit of a dick – not in real life, in terms of acting! – and then he can be very romantic and swoony. It’s a heck of a part for a young actor. Out of the three main actors [Ali Hadji-Heshmati plays George, Lockwood’s second-in-command] he’s the guy who really hadn’t been on camera before, but he does an exceptional job.”

But while fan approval is vital, even more key is winning the heart and mind of the man who dreamed up Lucy, Lockwood and their spook-riddled world in the first place.

“Jonathan has been very involved from the start,” says Cornish. “I formed a relationship with him in order to get him to give us the rights to the book, and then we’ve let him read every draft of the scripts. He’s come to visit the set, he’s sat down with the actors. He’s really into it and he’s been extraordinarily supportive, but sensibly he said to us, ‘Look, you go and do your thing. I understand this is a different beast, between the page and the screen.’

“But I hope, and I trust, that he has been surprised by how much we’ve just stuck to what he’s done. Because it’s really, really good. He’s provided pretty incredible material.” ●

Lockwood & Co is on Netflix from 27 January.

DANCING

EVERYONE DESERVES A KILLER FRIEND… MEET THE CREATORS OF M3GAN

WORDS: **DARREN SCOTT**

QU3EN

“The overall experience of the film is really unsettling – in a fun way”

YOU’VE SEEN THE MEMES, you’ve seen the dancing, you’ve probably heard the incredible word-of-mouth – it seems M3GAN is the breakout star of 2023, and it’s only January. For those avoiding spoilers/the internet/killer dolls (delete as applicable), M3GAN is the titular character of Universal’s new horror movie.

An eerily life-like doll, Model 3 Generative Android – or M3GAN for short – has been built using AI in order to become a protective companion to children. She’s brought into action when her creator Gemma (Allison Williams) suddenly finds herself caring for her orphaned niece Cady.

Look, you know where this is going don’t you? “We all came up with dolls of some kind in our lives, and while we love them, there is that inherently creepy thing about them,” writer Akela Cooper laughs. “Creepy dolls are eternal.”

Cooper tells *SFX* she’s loved horror since she was a child – thanks to her older sister not caring what she was watching while babysitting. Pairing her love of scaring people and writing, Cooper describes it as “like chocolate and peanut butter”.

LIVING DOLL

As an ’80s kid, she loves monster designs. “I always dreamed of growing up and creating a monster that would eventually become a toy and as iconic as Freddy, Jason and Pumpkinhead. I love a good monster movie.” During her career in television it was creating creatures she wanted to get back to, and some spec scripts found their way to Atomic Monster, one of the production companies on *M3GAN*.

“They brought me in for a meeting and pitched this loose idea that they had been kicking around about a new updated horror doll movie, because James Wan [*Saw*/*Annabelle*], he loves dolls, clearly.

“I came up with the story, we took it to Blumhouse and here we are. It was cool to be part of such a smooth process. Obviously, a lot of times it doesn’t happen in the industry like that! Very simple: ‘We want to do an updated horror doll movie.’ And it’s like, ‘Hell yeah, I’m in.’”

Similarly, the producers at Blumhouse had been trying to find the right project to work on with director Gerard Johnstone. “I was a new dad, and struggling to parent in the age of technology,” he explains. “This just felt like a really great way to put all those anxieties on screen.”

He says there were “a multitude of things” in the script that appealed to him. “I was so angry about how pervasive iPads and cellphones were, and how no one was really talking about it. And essentially M3GAN is an iPad with legs.

“I was having all these anxieties, and I just felt like the world was moving so fast and we needed to really understand what we were doing to our kids before we just stick all this technology [in front of them].

“Suddenly schools just became all about iPads. It was hard and I was getting really frustrated with it. So *M3GNAN*’s a chance for me to just put all of those annoyances on screen and make a really fun technology-run-amok movie.”

IN YOUR FACE

A return to something fun was certainly at the forefront of Cooper’s script. “We had a period of quote unquote elevated horror, which was still good horror,” she says. “There’s places for all horror, though I do have to say, personally, as a child of the ’80s, I am happy that we’re coming back to that ’80s sensibility of fun, wild horror.

“I was happy to have a hand in that last year with *Malignant*. For horror fans, it’s a smorgasbord, they have their pick of what they want to see. Variety is always nice.”

The director says that viewers shouldn’t expect a let-up from being tense, however. “*M3GAN* is scary more by virtue of you’re *dealing* with this,” Johnstone explains. “She’s front and centre on screen. It’s not like other movies where you have a sinister presence that’s lurking in the shadows and it’s maybe more about jump scares.

“M3GAN is a character in the movie. She’s not a presence. So she’s just very unsettling. It’s more that the overall experience of the film is really unsettling – in a fun way!”

That’s not to say there’s no inventive kills and body horror… “Well, it’s PG-13,” he reasons. “But within the bounds of that, we’ve managed to get very creative. It’s funny, because we made it thinking it would be an R-rated [18] film. But as I was making it I was also thinking if we dropped a couple of things, this could be PG-13 and it would just be great if more people could see it.

“When Universal decided, ‘Could this be PG-13?’ we just got creative. We did a little bit of additional photography, and actually made some things more effective. I was really stoked with that. I don’t think anyone will be disappointed! She doesn’t just dance, there’s a lot more in the film that I think people are gonna find surprising.”

“I will say this,” Cooper adds. “Like *Malignant*, it’s probably best to go in as fresh as possible…”

M3GAN has, according to some people, already been adopted as a queer icon. “I

Jack Cassidy as Brandon: ow ow ow.

“M3GAN, play *Respect* by Erasure.”

David (Ronny Chieng) isn’t a fan…

Cady (Violet McGraw) meets M3GAN (Amie Donald).

actually asked one of my friends who is a gay man about that,” Cooper offers, “and he was saying this set-up is actually found family, where this little girl has lost her family, and she has to go live with her aunt. Then this doll is also brought into the situation. That resonates for a lot of people in the gay community, the idea of found family.

“He was just like, it was really good that we started from that character, and that emotional aspect of it, because that’s what pulled in people in the gay community, and then you get to the dance scene. And it’s like, ‘Yes! Yes to all of this!’ and it’s just even better. So I like to think that it is the emotional aspect that pulls people in first, and then M3GAN’s awesome dance moves seal the deal.”

Is there a chance we may yet see M3GAN dance another day in a sequel? “I think the door would be open to doing that, to sustain where this could go,” Johnstone suggests. “I know that James has some ideas on that. Making the movie, I’ve certainly had some ideas about it – you can’t not. I think she is a worthy character of spending more time with, for sure.”

...and with good reason, let’s face it.

As for further stories with Gabriel, Cooper is up for a *Malignant* return. “We had a really good story that left the door open. So if James Wan and Ingrid [Bisu, co-writer] ever wanted to revisit *Malignant*, I would be down.”

Meanwhile, the *M3GAN* team still can’t get over the positive response to the first trailer for the film. “It was something that people didn’t realise they wanted until the trailer came out,” Cooper reasons. “Just to see people get behind it and to celebrate her as a horror icon before the film had even come out,” Johnstone smiles. “I couldn’t have asked for more.

“It’s funny, because I told Universal I was concerned that we’re giving too much away with the dancing. I just thought, ‘Show a hint of it, don’t keep cutting back to it’. And thankfully, they didn’t listen to me, because it just meant that everyone was able to recut it and make entirely new trailers out of it.

“And it was awesome. So I’m glad they didn’t listen to me!” ●

M3GAN is in cinemas from 13 January.

ALLISON WILLIAMS

On producing and starring with M3GAN

What was your journey to this movie?
I first got involved in the fall of 2019. I got a text from Jason Blum, something to the effect of, “I’m sending you something, we’re going to need your help again.” Very flattering, obviously. Reading the script, getting to know Gerard, starting to work on it, it just became clear that this is M3GAN’s moment. It’s a project of our time, I think. I wanted to do everything I could to help bring it to life, including produce on it, but also be Gemma, the person who literally brings M3GAN to life.

What was it about the script that particularly attracted you?
There are a couple of different things operating in parallel. One is there’s a very real human story at the centre of it, which is that Gemma’s being asked to show up for her niece in a way that she isn’t sure she can, and isn’t sure she wants to. So that very human feeling of inadequacy in the face of real struggle was something that drew me to it.

Then, of course, there was just the idea of how quickly we seem to be headed in the direction of companions that are not of human origin. It starts with Siri or Alexa. It just feels like we’re marching in this direction a little and to extrapolate us forward slightly to see what it might look like was very, very interesting to me.

What was it like working opposite M3GAN?
M3GAN is M3GAN. M3GAN is unlike anyone I’ve ever worked with before. A really unique experience. That is all I’ll say for now. I want people to just think of her as who and what she is for now. But it was definitely a different kind of working experience, for sure.

What do you think people will take away from seeing *M3GAN*?
What they leave thinking about is going to sort of be a Rorschach test. The movie has a lot of areas that one could get stuck in, and think about, and iterate on, and it’ll be really interesting to hear how people come away from it. I do think one of the central themes of this movie, and often in movies about the interface of humanity and technology, is just that there is something about humans that is irreplaceable – and we lose sight of that at our peril. So I’m hoping that as we walk out of the theatre with our fellow humans, we’ll look at them in a new way. And then when we get home to our smartphones, we will look at those in a new way as well.

WITCH DOCTOR

ANNE RICE'S **MAYFAIR WITCHES** SERIES ADAPTATION EXPANDS AMC'S IMMORTAL UNIVERSE

WORDS: **TARA BENNETT**

IT'S ONLY BEEN A YEAR SINCE ANNE Rice, the prolific author of gothic, supernatural novels, including *The Vampire Chronicles*, passed away. And while her fans are still grieving, they've also been gifted with a brand new way to experience her worlds and characters with the birth of AMC's Immortal Universe.

Launched in October last year with the series adaptation of *Interview With The Vampire*, which received both audience and critical acclaim, the interconnected universe based on her mythology continues in January with *Mayfair Witches*.

Based on Rice's Lives Of The Mayfair Witches trilogy, the series stars Alexandra Daddario as Dr Rowan Fielding, a San Francisco-based neurosurgeon who discovers her relation to an ancient, powerful coven of witches now based in New Orleans.

It's a story steeped in tradition, legacy and destiny, which demanded just the right hands to guide it into a nuanced adaptation. And in this case, maybe even a little divine connection, as creators/showrunners Michelle Ashford and Esta Spalding tell *SFX* that they both spent time in New Orleans and had very Rice-centric experiences that now seem rather fated.

"I lived in a place that was about eight blocks from Anne's house where she wrote the book," Spalding says. "I walked by that house every day and I would just think about her. She has written about the writing of the book and how she would get up and start madly typing in her nightgown. I could see the room where I knew she wrote it and walk by that."

Years ago, Michelle Ashford was actually pitched to collaborate on a project with Rice, and flew to New Orleans to spend a day with the author. "I had this absolutely surreal, incredible experience of one evening just hanging out with Anne, starting in the early →

Dr Rowan Fielding chats with Cortland Mayfair.

Rowan (Alexandra Daddario): confused.

afternoon in her First Street house, which is just as gorgeous and spooky as you would think."

Ashford remembers that she was taken by Rice to visit another property she owned, a former orphanage. "It was filled like a museum with all these tableaux with all these dolls," she says, slightly shuddering. "And here's the great news about Anne: she was the real deal. She was not messing around and she really lived it. She was filled with such an intense, spiritual, supernatural compass. She was really deeply, deeply in this world."

Anne and her son Christopher Rice were heavily involved in the development process, and the two writers say they were thrilled that from the start it was clear that AMC Studios and Immortal Universe executive producer Mark Johnson were interested in creating a series that captured the spirit and mythology of Rice's work in the best ways possible. "They allowed us to create a world that is unique to the witches part of Anne's big canvas, which has been fantastic," Ashford says.

WITCH, PLEASE

The first season of *Mayfair Witches* consists of eight episodes, and pulls its narrative primarily from Rice's 1990 book *The Witching Hour*. While the major plot points, like Rowan's discovery of her heritage and connection to an evil spirit known as Lasher, remain core to the series, Ashford says that they also wanted to contemporise the series to take into account what's happening to women today.

"When Anne wrote these books, #MeToo hadn't happened, and a lot has changed," she explains. "But a really cool thing is that her book about witches goes back and taps into a time where witches had enormous power. They were healers. Anyone who assumes to control the levers of life and death is by definition a power.

"Way, way, way back when women were the healers, the patriarchy got very, very uneasy about that and started to demonise them," she continues. And we love that Anne made Rowan a doctor, because we thought, 'Of course, she's a healer.'"

Developing their take, Ashford says they got into a fascinating conversation about the real world being on the precipice of an inflection point where whatever is coming next may assign power differently. And if women are in charge of that, what would that look like?

"If women really did run the world, would they recapitulate and remake power in the same way that the patriarchy does, or would they change the structures of power?" Ashford poses. "That feels like a question that can last for many, many, many seasons. But the first season is really about Rowan deciding to take on this kind of power at all."

Finding the right actress to embody the struggle of that choice was, of course, key, and the duo had their sights set on Alexandra Daddario for their Rowan from early on. "When we first were starting this, we were sitting around going, 'Okay, who would be the perfect Rowan witch?' And we actually came up with Alexandra," Ashford shares. "It was a complete gut thing. And then we met her and I will tell you, she brings a ton to it."

Spalding agrees, adding: "Every single day on set, I was just blown away by how wide open she was, how much she threw herself into it. She went to every place we asked her to go, which was a lot of places with this character, and made herself incredibly vulnerable to whatever the experience was that Rowan was going to be having. We got so, so, so lucky, because that's the kind of ferocity that this character requires."

The two writers tease that as the season progresses, Rowan becomes more empowered with the knowledge of her lineage. With that, she will have to choose between remaining just a doctor or embracing being a witch, along with everything that comes with that.

"And if she takes on this power, which is both creative healing power and also destructive killing power, what's she going to do with that?" Ashford asks. "What are the other women in the family gonna do with it? How will they build a power structure? The

Veteran Harry Hamlin plays Cortland.

Jack Huston as Lasher. Matt Berry was not available.

Tongayi Chirisa as Ciprien Grieve.

Beth Grant as Carlotta Mayfair.

interesting thing about drama is that they're gonna make a lot of mistakes."

As the series is called *Mayfair Witches*, naturally enough the story arc will also fold in the backgrounds of other women in the coven, played by veteran genre actresses like Annabeth Gish (*The X-Files*), Beth Grant (*Pushing Daisies*) and Erica Gimpel (*Profiler*). "This first season is very focused on Rowan as an entryway into the family, but we were careful to make sure that the other characters we introduce each has a fantastic moment or two of their own where something turned for them or changed for them," Spalding says.

Rice's book *The Witching Hour* goes deeply into the 400-year history of the Mayfair women, which the showrunners have decided to save for future seasons. But Spalding teases that they will lightly touch on that lore in season one. "We do have one story that's set in Scotland, where the Mayfair Witches originate, and so that character is really fully developed."

However, a book character who will get plenty of screen time from the pilot forwards is the aforementioned Lasher (Jack Huston). He's framed in the novels as a generational demonic influence preying on the Mayfair women for a specific purpose, but Spalding says they will use him a little differently.

"Lasher is, for us, less a demonic presence and more a version of the embodiment of power," she says. "In the first season, Lasher is almost a lens that can enlarge Rowan's power to teach her, do you truly want to embody all the power that is both creative and destructive? Or do you want to take on the nice parts of power, the healing parts and the intuition, and sort of put gloves on your power? She's choosing between that, her full witchy self, and this other more domesticated, careful use of power."

A BRIMFUL OF LASHER

How Lasher will grow as an overall threat will, the two say, become clearer to audiences as the first season progresses. But savvy book readers are well aware of the integral part he plays in Rice's larger supernatural mythology.

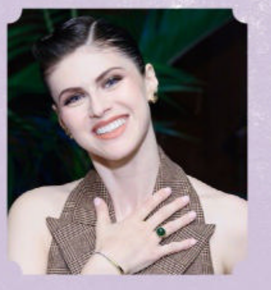
Thus, as well as shaping their own series, Ashford and Spalding are also working closely with *Interview With A Vampire* showrunners Rolin Jones and Mark Johnson to look at the bigger stories that will overlap in the Immortal Universe. For now, Ashford says they hope audiences take to *Mayfair* as well as they did to *Interview*, and see how much passion they have for Rice.

"Sadly, Anne passed away when we were making this, but I'm just so glad that we got to bring it full circle, We're trying to do our best here to let her legacy live on." ●

Anne Rice's Mayfair Witches is on AMC+ and AMC from 8 January. UK details are TBC.

MAYFAIR LADY

Alexandra Daddario is Doctor Rowan Fielding



Before you were cast, had you read any Anne Rice novels?

I was not familiar with the source material prior to doing the show, but I'm almost done with the book now as we're finishing the series. And I've started *Interview With The Vampire*, so I'm really getting into Anne Rice. I'm reading a lot of her interviews and learning more about her, and the metaphors, and the material, and where these characters came from, where these crazy ideas came from, and it's been amazing. Anne Rice is a fascinating woman. A very, very interesting person.

The series was filmed in New Orleans, Rice's old stomping grounds. How did you find the vibe there?

I love the people – the people are really laid back. And because of the environment that they live in, and all the storms they've been through and everything they've been through, they're really close-knit. It has a sort of small-town family vibe, which is wonderful.

***Mayfair Witches* is a really visceral book. Is that translated into the series?**

It's very perverse, a lot of the beats. It's very, very disturbing in these very uniquely psychological ways that only Anne Rice could do. We are bringing it into the show. I just think it's incredible to do something that is based on an Anne Rice novel and also bring that unique touch of weirdness and her investment in the dark side of human nature, with no rejection of it. That creates a really unique genre piece, I think.

GETTY

SFX DOCTOR 60 WHO

THE DYING DAYS

SFX GETS AN EXCLUSIVE LOOK BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE FILMING OF DOCTOR WHO CENTENARY SPECIAL "THE POWER OF THE DOCTOR" AND BIDS A FOND FAREWELL TO JODIE WHITTAKER'S THIRTEENTH DOCTOR

WORDS: **DARREN SCOTT**

POLICE PUBLIC CALL BOX

The Doctor realises what's about to happen...

◀ Jodie Whittaker and Mandip Gill share a hug while recording one of their final transmitted scenes.

▲ A previously unseen alternative posed shot featuring Janet Fielding as Tegan and Sophie Aldred as Ace.

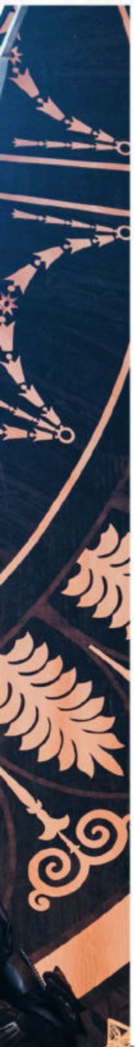
Mandip Gill captured smiling during final scenes on the TARDIS set. ▼

ALL IMAGES © BBC

Sacha Dhawan as the Master presents a circle of deep-fried Cybermen.

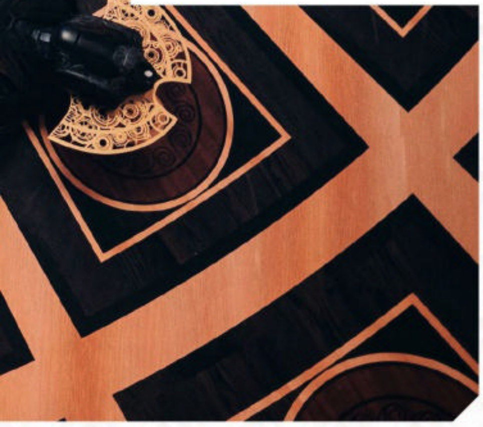
Four legends sharing a laugh – The Fugitive Doctor (Jo Martin), the Master (Sacha Dhawan), Yasmin Khan (Mandip Gill) and Vinder (Jacob Anderson).

ALL IMAGES © BBC



Could they be best friends? The Master-Doctor makes good use of the TARDIS wardrobe.

Don't mess with her, mate. Jo Martin *is* the Fugitive Doctor.



Sacha Dhawan gets up close and personal with his sonic.

Jodie Whittaker gets a round of applause during her final shooting days on the series.

Paul McGann (sans robes) returns as the Eighth Doctor, appearing in the Thirteenth Doctor's mind.

Sylvester McCoy films his AI interface scene opposite Sophie Aldred as Ace.

New and old fam together – Dan (John Bishop), Yaz (Mandip Gill), the Doctor (Jodie Whittaker) and Graham (Bradley Walsh).

David Bradley does his First Doctor direct to camera as only he can.

ALL IMAGES © BBC

Colin Baker is ready for his close-up in his first canonical return to screen *Doctor Who* since 1986.

V508 8
DOCTOR WHO

It's Peter Davison's turn to sit next to a pole.

JAMEELA JAMIL

On surfing the mega-franchises and becoming *Star Trek*'s latest Trill...

Words by Darren Scott

As Ensign Asencia, a Trill officer aboard USS Dauntless in *Star Trek: Prodigy*, Jameela Jamil has finally achieved a lifelong ambition to appear in *Star Trek*. A self-confessed geek, who lovingly described NYCC as "Nerd Pride", she's been attending conventions for years. In fact, she even spent an entire weekend going incognito in *Super Mario Bros* costume with loads of people stopping her for photos. "So if you're out there, you have a selfie with me and you have no idea." But there's one more franchise the *She-Hulk* star would like to join...

How familiar were you with the *Star Trek* universe?

Very. I've been watching with my brother since I was a little kid. It became a really big part of my childhood, where I learned a lot of important lessons. I think that's what's so cool about this franchise is that it teaches you so many important things about life, and about different people and the differences that we have, and how we can overcome those things to work together. You don't realise you're being taught that, so kind of "a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down". It's a well-disguised lesson.

You watched *Voyager* as a kid and now you're acting alongside...

Captain fucking Janeway! It's crazy. She tweeted me yesterday and I almost wet myself. It's incredible. I will never forget the first moment her voice came through my headphones when I was in the recording booth. I don't normally get to hear the other actors. But I interact so heavily with her that they thankfully recorded her part before mine. So I got to say all of my lines to her voice and that gave me proper chills, it was so surreal. We have quite a few recurring old flames from the *Star Trek* franchise coming in and that's exciting. It's definitely a thrill if you're someone who understands and loves this world.

How do you feel about the love for *She-Hulk*?

It's been really exciting to have *She-Hulk* well received. It feels like a lot of people who maybe before didn't always see their stories represented in Marvel, especially how much this is through a female lens. I think they've been very appreciative and very vocal about how nice it's been to see a story of a woman's experience of patriarchy. We've had lots of amazing women characters in Marvel, and in the MCU especially, but I don't know if we've ever been able to have the humane conversation. This is one of the more grounded shows, we were trying something really different. And I'm aware that some people have not liked how much we have strayed from the traditional Marvel formula. But surely, if it's a whole universe, and we have so many opportunities to tell so many different types of stories, we should welcome people who've strayed from the ordinary and take risks. The whole of Marvel – the whole of this genre – is about people who take risks, and we did and I'm glad it paid off.

Were you aware of Titania's *Secret Wars* origins?

I'm so aware of that. I would love to be able to tell that original iteration. I think what they did was so cool and so funny with making her a relatable social media influencer. But there's a whole other world to Titania and a whole other side to her. I really love Dan Slotts's version as well, where she's bullied as a child and that's what makes her so insecure. That's what I had in my head, even though we weren't telling that story. That's the version of her, her most insecure side, throughout everything I was delivering. It's only in kind of episode six that you get to see that little glimpse of that insecurity that drives Titania. But the Doctor Doom version of Titania is something that I really want to bring to life, I want to bring the Absorbing Man in, I want Volcana. I don't know if Marvel will ever bring me back, but if they do that's the story I would most love to tell.

Is there a franchise that you would like to join?

I've done DC, I've done the MCU, I've now joined *Star Trek*, so it feels only natural that I should at least be allowed to do catering at *Star Wars*. I've been referring to it as my nerd EGOT – that would be the ultimate dream come true and fulfil every 12-year-old fantasy I had.

What would you ideally like to be in *Star Wars*?

I'd take literally anything, but I think a villain. I do really love playing the bad guy. I enjoy complex characters who start off as a mentally unrelatable, who we can find the relatability of. Right now we are so divided. We almost seek to misunderstand each other. If we don't understand each other, we're never going to be able to find a way back to one another. That's something that I'm very drawn to, helping people understand people who are different to them. And so I'm into playing the villains.

Star Trek: Prodigy is on Paramount+ and Nickelodeon now. She-Hulk is on Disney+.

BIODATA

From
London, England

Greatest Hits
Deceased philanthropist Tahani in *The Good Place*, Wonder Woman in *DC League Of Super-Pets*, influencer Titania in *She-Hulk: Attorney At Law*, camp counsellor Roxie in *Jurassic World Camp Cretaceous*.

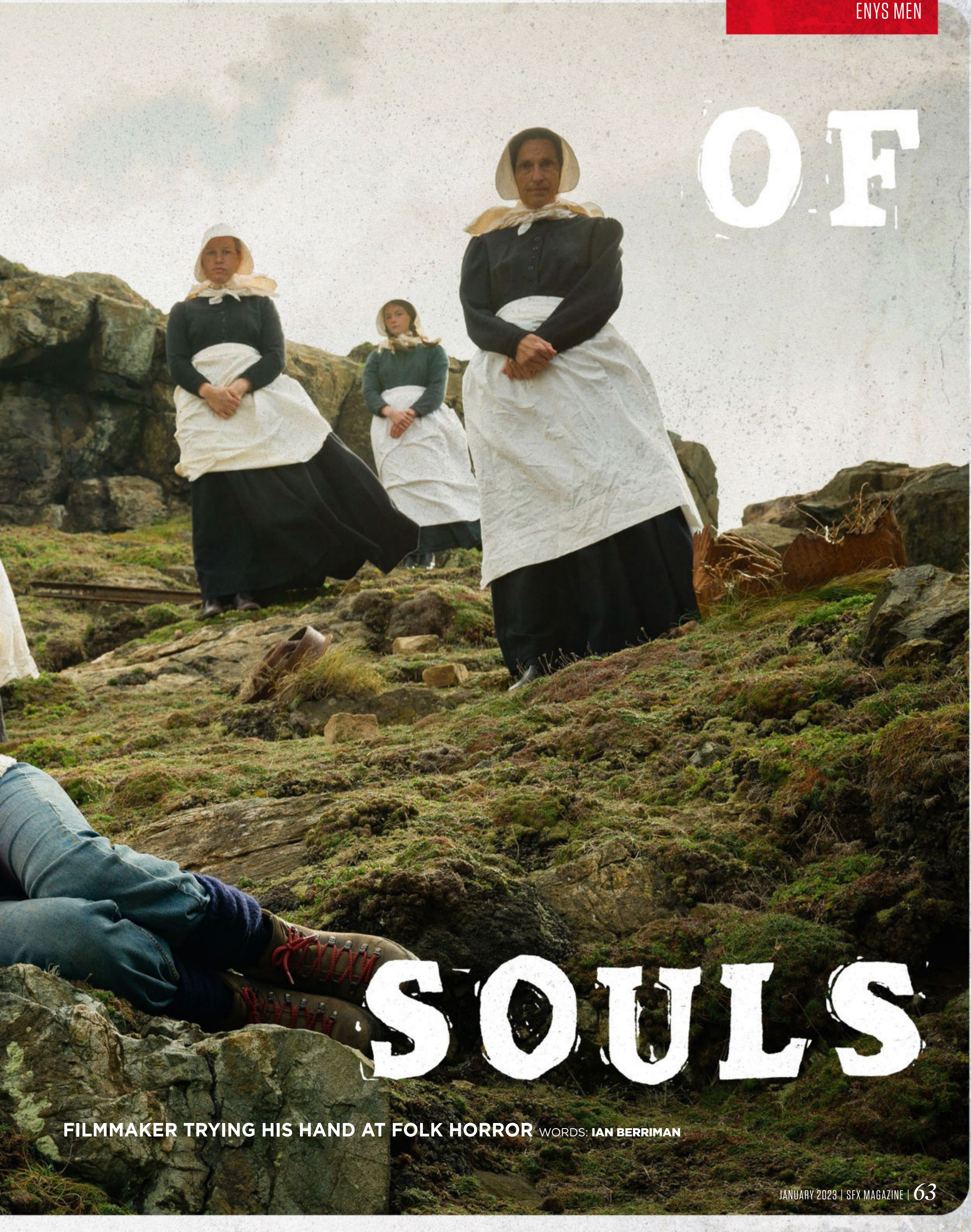
Random Fact
She contributed to her partner James Blake's 2021 album *Friends That Break Your Heart*.

© MARVEL

> “It feels only natural that I should at least be allowed to do catering at Star Wars”

ISLAND LOST

MARK JENKIN'S ENYS MEN **SEES THE BAFTA-WINNING**



OF SOULS

FILMMAKER TRYING HIS HAND AT FOLK HORROR WORDS: **IAN BERRIMAN**

"CAN YOU PUT IN YOUR article that it's really important everybody sees it at least four times?" jokes Mark Jenkin. "Commercially speaking, that would be ideal." Happy to oblige, as there may be something in that.

We catch up with the Cornish director during a spare hour at BFI Southbank, before he reviews a print of *Enys Men*, his follow-up to the critically acclaimed *Bait*. Jenkin's 2019 drama about a struggling fisherman earned him a BAFTA for Outstanding Debut. *Enys Men* (for those wondering: Enys rhymes with tennis and is Cornish for island, while Men sounds like main and translates as stone) sees him moving into eerie, fantastical territory.

This is not a straightforward chiller, though, but something more elusive and allusive. If the film chimes with you then you'll probably want to watch it again, in the hope that your understanding of it further coalesces. However, as the director himself admits, "Some people will walk away really regretting seeing it.

"If I want to really torture myself, I can go on and read comments on Letterboxd," he tells *SFX*. "What's interesting is, when I look at *Bait*, it's all four stars, mostly. With *Enys Men*, it's one star or five stars – these real extremes of opinion. Which is great!"

TROUBLE WITH LICHEN

Set in 1973, the film centres on an unnamed volunteer (Mary Woodvine) living in a cottage on an uninhabited island off the Cornish coast. Her daily task is to observe a rare flower growing on a clifftop, logging her observations. Then, as the official synopsis puts it, events "take a dark turn into the strange and metaphysical, forcing her to question what is real and what is nightmare".

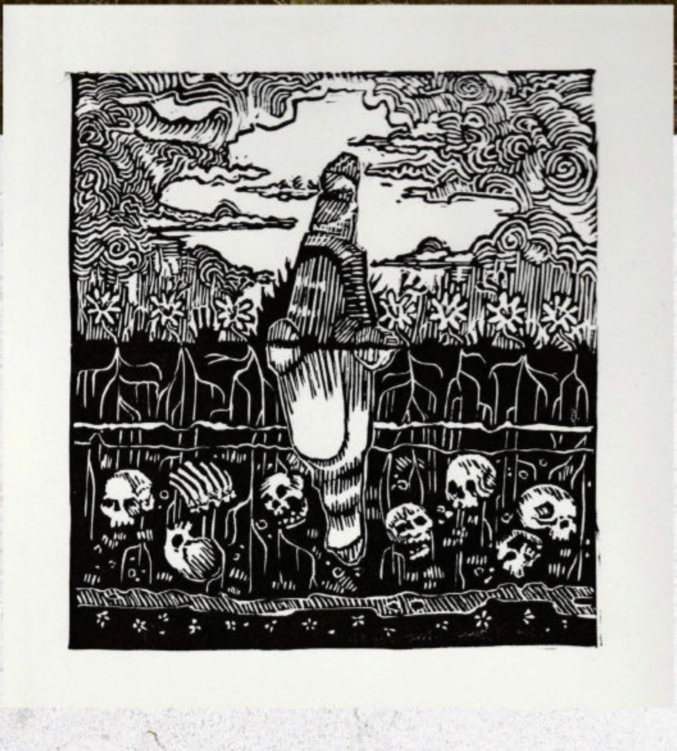
The puzzle pieces include: figures from the past, such as tin miners and "bal maidens" (the women who processed the ore); a standing stone; a strange lichen; and a piece of wreckage from a boat. In his press notes, the director adds to the list "religion, horticulture, sacrifice, fuel shortages, birth and death, sex, saffron buns, and block universe theory".

"I don't mind people not understanding it as long as they feel it," Jenkin says, before referencing a quote by French director Robert Bresson: "I'd rather people feel a film before understanding it."

"People have said to me that the plot's really complicated, but there isn't a lot of plot really – deliberately. I really struggle with plot when I'm watching films. I'm much more interested in people engaging with themes rather than the specifics of the plot."

So why the switch from the realism of *Bait* to something with such a strong sense of the uncanny? In part, the

Health and safety warning: do not try this.



Lydia Jenkins's original artwork "Karrek Unn", seen on a wall of the cottage.

“I’m more interested in people engaging with themes rather than the specifics of the plot”

decision was driven by childhood memories. “I inadvertently had the shit scared out of me by my dad, when I was young, by a couple of standing stones,” explains Jenkin, whose gran lived close to the Merry Maidens, a stone circle near St Buryan in West Penwith (the Land’s End peninsula). “The Christian mythology that grew up around them was that they were 19 girls who were turned to stone as a punishment for dancing on the Sabbath.

“There are two larger stones nearby that were the Pipers who were playing the music for the girls to dance to,” Jenkin continues. “They’re off in other fields, and you kind of glimpse them as you’re driving through gateways. As a kid, I was freaked out by them because I’d never got up close to them – I’d only ever glimpse them through gaps in the hedge. I was convinced they moved – that sometimes they were there, sometimes they weren’t. So that was something I’d always wanted to do, to represent that on screen.”

Another motivation was the unexpected way some viewers responded to the formal properties of *Bait* – shot on 16mm, in monochrome, and 4:3 ratio. “People were saying that it felt like a horror film at times,” Jenkin says, “That there was a sense of foreboding, and that it felt like it could tip over into a horror film at any time. I’m a big horror fan, but I’d never thought of making horror. I felt that was an invitation for me to make one.”

When he sat down to write the script, however, it didn’t quite turn out as planned. →

PICTURES BY STEVE TANNER, STOCK ART © GETTY

DRY SPELL

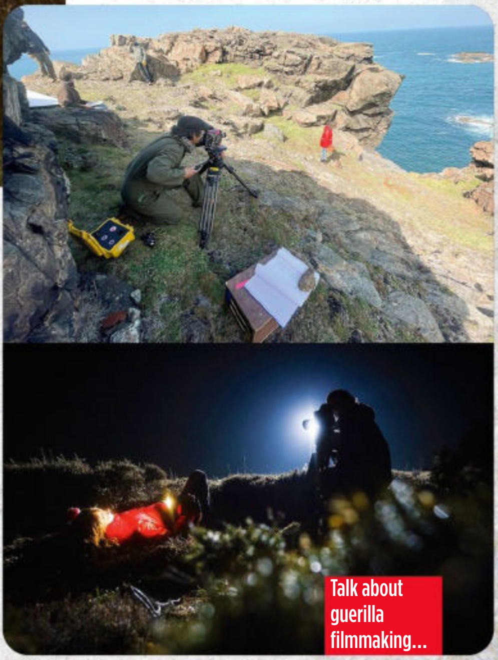
There was no rain on *Enys Men*

With many of the events of *Enys Men* taking place on a clifftop or rugged moorland, you might assume it was challenging to make. But while its titular island might be cursed, the shoot seems to have been blessed.

“The locations are all within 10 or 15 minutes of where I live, between Penzance and Land’s End,” explains Jenkin, noting that the titular standing stone is the Boswens Menhir, near St Just. They’re also all on the mainland. “The wide shot of the island is Skomer Island off west Wales, but we never set foot on that.

“We somehow did a deal with the Devil so we didn’t have a single drop of rain for the entire shoot,” he recalls – this despite location filming taking place in March and April. “Colin Holt, who works on the camera with me – his mantra was ‘There’ll be no rain on *Enys Men*’, which he said every day.”

We suspect Colin may be a sorcerer. “There was a time when we were filming on the cliff and you could see, a kilometre out to sea, it was torrential rain. To the west, it was raining. To the east, it was raining, To the south, it was raining. When we wrapped, everybody went through rain to get home. But we were in this little island of dry. No shit, it was really weird!”



Talk about guerilla filmmaking…

Mary Woodvine plays The Volunteer.

"I wrote it very quickly, in about three nights, and when I read it back it just wasn't a horror script. That was when the penny dropped and I thought, 'Actually, the horror is in the *form* rather than in the content. If the film's untrustworthy, and the actual film is haunted, as well as the people within the film, then that might work.'"

What exactly does he mean by "untrustworthy"? Well, take, for example, certain shots of waves crashing on rocks. They generate a nagging sense that something is *off*. Then the penny drops: the waves are crashing backwards, because the footage has been reversed. If you don't spot things like that straight away, don't beat yourself up, since there are moments that fool Jenkin himself – as he realised when he reviewed a reel.

"It had a bit of backwards action in it, and I'd forgotten it was backwards. I thought, 'Wow, that's a really weird bit of performance Mary does there, it's brilliant!' Then I thought, 'No, wait, it's because it's played backwards.' All she does is take one step away from the window, which looks normal. But as she does it she blinks, and it's the blink that looks weird – it's really odd. So there's a few moments like that."

MAKING A SPLASH

The use of foley/sound effects is similarly wrong-footing. The 1976-vintage Bolex camera Jenkin used – the same one he shot *Bait* with – can't record sync-sound, so dialogue and sound effects have to be added later. And while sometimes the director revisits locations to make field recordings, he confesses that "Sometimes I can't be bothered!"

That means turning to sound effects libraries, which provide a way to add another layer of abstraction. "A lot of the wind soundbed I used is an Arctic whistling wind," Jenkin says, by way of example. "It's the same wind that they'd have pasted over *Frozen Planet* or something. So visually, what it should be is an ice cap. But if you put it in the background of a woman walking into a cottage, suddenly it's really eerie, without you being able to understand why the scene feels weird.

"If you do something sonically it's much harder to unpick as a viewer, I think," he adds, before providing another example: a shot of a seabird diving into the sea. "I was trying to get the sound of a gannet hitting the surface of the water, on a windy day, from about 300 metres away – which is quite a specific sound effect to find in a library!

"I had a bucket of water in the studio and was trying things, and thinking, 'This is just nuts.' Then I thought, 'Why don't I just use something else?' So I grabbed a sound effect already used somewhere else in the film, of smashing glass, and just dropped that on the shot."

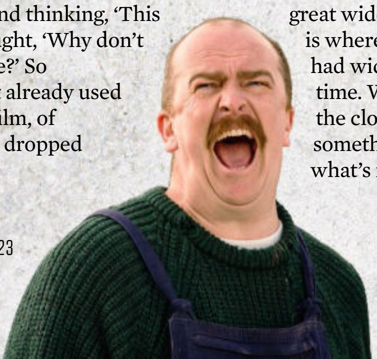
> "If you do something sonically it's much harder to unpick as a viewer, I think"

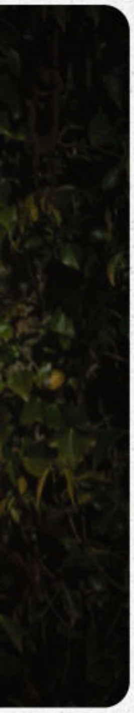
She's obviously a big fan of the stones.

The primary means by which the film is made to feel "untrustworthy", however, is through the editing (asked to put a figure on it, Jenkin says "about 80%" of his filmmaking process occurs in the edit). *Enys Men* is replete with close-ups of small details. The gradual accretion of these causes the film to feel pregnant with unexplained significance.

"The close-up is the beauty of cinema, really," says Jenkin. "We think of cinema as the great wide vistas, but for me the close-up is where cinema really comes alive. We had wide shots in theatre for a long time. What you don't have in theatre is the close-up, that ability to isolate something and give significance to what's insignificant just by putting it in

The film itself has a grainier look to it.





The Boswens Menhir, near St Just.

the frame. Certainly with horror, it's such a good tool to use the close-up and use montage, because it means you're withholding information all the time. The closer you are to an object, the more it makes the viewer wonder what's just *outside* the frame, as well as what's significant within the frame. What *aren't* we being shown?"

While some of those close-ups were planned, others came about serendipitously. "I'll have a few feet left at the end of a roll of film and want to fire it off before I change the roll," Jenkin explains. "I'll look around and spot something that the art directors or production designers have brought in as background and think, 'That's great, I'll get a shot of that.' Then that becomes significant within the edit."

You'll be able to spot some of those off-the-cuff shots by a tell-tale red flaring. "When I'm loading the camera, there'll be a bit of a light leak," Jenkin explains. "That will normally be on shots of inanimate objects, because it'll be things that I've shot at the beginning and end of each roll. It's quite nice, because it gives a bit of animation to scenes that haven't necessarily got that in them. It's like the film is alive while it's filming something that's static or inanimate."

This aesthetic is, Jenkin points out, forced upon him by choosing the hand-wound Bolex, which he operates himself (taking his list of credits to writer, director, film and sound editor, composer *and* director of photography). All he can do is embrace its limitations. "It only runs for about 27 seconds for each wind," he explains, "and it uses very small lenses, which are almost impossible to focus-pull on. That really dictates how the film looks – I can't do intricate movements.

"The fractured montage element within the edit is dictated by the camera as well, because I don't shoot coverage. I can't shoot an uninterrupted wide shot four or five minutes long because the camera can't do that, so I just shoot the fragments. Then what happens in the edit is I realise that I haven't got all the fragments I need! So the non-linear element then comes into it."

What's going on with these flowers?

HARD TO SAY

The result is, *SFX* remarks, a film you can grasp on a subconscious, intuitive level, but whose meaning is tricky to put into words.

"Well I think that's good, isn't it?" Jenkin says. "I think in the formulation of the film it's quite important *not* to articulate it. That's why I make films, because if I could articulate it with language then I'd just write it as a story and not have to go through the total ballache of making a film!

"With all of my favourite films, I can't articulate why I like them," he adds. "I go back and watch *Persona* [Ingmar Bergman, 1966] all the time. I still haven't got a clue what's going on in that film, but I watch it over and over again."

So now that *Enys Men* is finally about to reach a wider audience than critics and film festival attendees, are all interpretations equally valid, or are there any answers that are just plain wrong?

"Yeah, there's a few people who said 'This is a load of fucking shit,'" the director laughs. "Which I think is the wrong reaction!" ●

Enys Men is on general release from 13 January, with previews from 2 January – see enysmen.co.uk/tickets for details.

And what could go wrong in the local church?

UNDER THE INFLUENCE

The director has turned curator for the BFI

To tie in with the film's release, Jenkin has curated a season of 23 features, shorts and TV episodes entitled *The Cinematic DNA Of Enys Men*, which will run throughout January at BFI Southbank and on the BFI Player service. Some of his choices use similar formal techniques – like Agnas Varda's 1976 documentary *Daguerreotypes*, which he describes as "a masterclass in editing". Others have related subject matter.

"There's obvious things like 'Stigma', by Lawrence Gordon Clark", Jenkin says, referring to the 1977 *Ghost Story For Christmas* centred on a standing stone. "*Haunters Of The Deep* [1984], a Children's Film Foundation film, uses some of the same locations. And 'Oss Oss Wee Oss' [1953] is about Padstow May Day, one of the ancient May Day celebrations in Cornwall."

The filmmaker also doffs his hat to some formative influences. "'A Journey To Avebury' [1971] is representative of all Derek Jarman's influence on me. And *Walkabout* was probably my awakening, as somebody who's interested in film. It was the first time I watched a film and was blown away by the control the director could have over what the viewer was seeing."

Nicolas Roeg's 1971 outback tale was also a direct, conscious influence on *Enys Men*. "The playing backwards sequences are a nod to *Walkabout*," Jenkin reveals. "Luke Roeg's little boy character imagines animals that have been shot coming back to life. All Nic Roeg does is play the film backwards, and suddenly they stand back up."

In other instances, Jenkin only realised that there'd been an unconscious influence on his work later. "It turns out that I've stolen some shots from 'Stigma', which I didn't realise until I watched it again. And I use some of the same shots from *Haunters Of The Deep* as well. So it's quite nice. The DNA is real – it's stuff that I saw when I was young and has obviously gone in."

In another case, it took others to point out the similarities. "I saw *Jeanne Dielman* [1975] a long time ago, probably when I was at film school, then in reviews from Cannes two or three critics mentioned it. I went back and watched it, not thinking it'd had any influence on me, and was going, 'Oh my god, this is incredible.' Sometimes you don't know what you've done until somebody else tells you, and then I'm quite happy to go, 'Oh yeah, that's where that came from!'"

For more details, visit bit.ly/enysseason.

1974 TV play *Penda's Fen* is one inclusion.

Brought THE SFX AUTHOR INTERVIEW To Book

JONATHAN CARROLL

Choosing stories: the American novelist discusses his life and career

Words by Jonathan Wright /// Portrait by Ryder Carroll

THERE ARE WRITERS WHO WOULD LIKELY get tetchy if you were to frame a conversation about their work in comparison to a hit movie. Not Jonathan Carroll, who is happy to discuss his new novel *Mr Breakfast*, a tale of characters living out alternate lives, by referencing *Sliding Doors*, a film that explores two futures that spin out from missing or catching a Tube train.

"It's a universal thing all of us at one point or another, after about age 30, think: 'What if I had done this instead of that?'" Carroll says down the line from his home in Vienna. "*Sliding Doors* is the perfect example. In that case, it's forced on [Gwyneth Paltrow's character], but in our realistic human sense, we make the decisions. *I decided* to go into the subway car rather than stand on the platform."

The idea of alternate timelines is of course a staple of SF and slipstream fiction, but few handle it with the aplomb Carroll does in his latest novel. To quote Joe Hill, *Mr Breakfast* is "a small book of big ideas, a set of Russian nesting dolls with an entire universe glowing at the centre".

In part, that's because, while it initially focuses on failing comedian Graham Patterson, a man whose life takes a wholly unexpected turn because of his decision to get a tattoo, the book is ultimately about a cast of characters and how their lives intersect – and also the way we intersect with our own younger selves when we look back.

It's not much of a stretch to call Carroll, whose first novel *The Land Of Laughs* was published in 1980, a modern master of magical realism. Except that's to pigeonhole him and, like David Mitchell or Haruki Murakami, his work defies categorisation – which he resists because there are times when the term "magical realism" can be dismissive.

REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE

Sometimes, Carroll adds, it's just as bad when people are polite. "People say that [my writing] is sweet and generous, which is kind of like, 'There's nobody like him,'" Carroll says. "That's sort of nice and sort of not – y'know, it sounds like I'm a kangaroo with two heads." The thing is, though, that Carroll's fiction does have an underlying warmth, and there really isn't anyone else quite like him.

As to how this came about, one place to start is with Carroll the rebellious teen. "I loved fist-fighting and stealing," he says, "living the James Dean life. [I grew up in a] small town so the police force was four guys. They couldn't really keep up with us." This behaviour was "repetitive", or it was until Carroll's parents – scriptwriter Sidney, who co-wrote the screenplay for *The Hustler*, and singer/actor June – took matters in hand. "My parents got scared," he says. "They sent me off to this very strict private school in Connecticut. I was there for three years and hated every minute of it, but it kind of straightened me out."

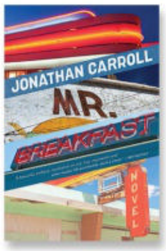
He "wasn't a good student", except when it came to English. "That was my redeeming quality and so I hung on to it, like a life raft: 'At least I'm good at *this*'." His last English teacher, a man who wrote for *The New Yorker*, told him one of his pieces was "just brilliant", an important moment in building the young Carroll's confidence. "Once that was said, I was a writer from then on."

BIODATA

From **New York**

Greatest Hits
The novels the man himself singles out are *Sleeping In Flame* (1988) from his Answered Prayers Sextet, *Outside The Dog Museum* (1992) and the concluding volume in his Crane's View trilogy, *The Wooden Sea* (2001). "I had the best time in writing those books."

Random Fact
As a boy, one of Carroll's heroes was African-American wrestler "Sailor" Art Thomas. Aged seven or eight, Carroll bumped into him in Manhattan and got his autograph.



VIENNA CALLING

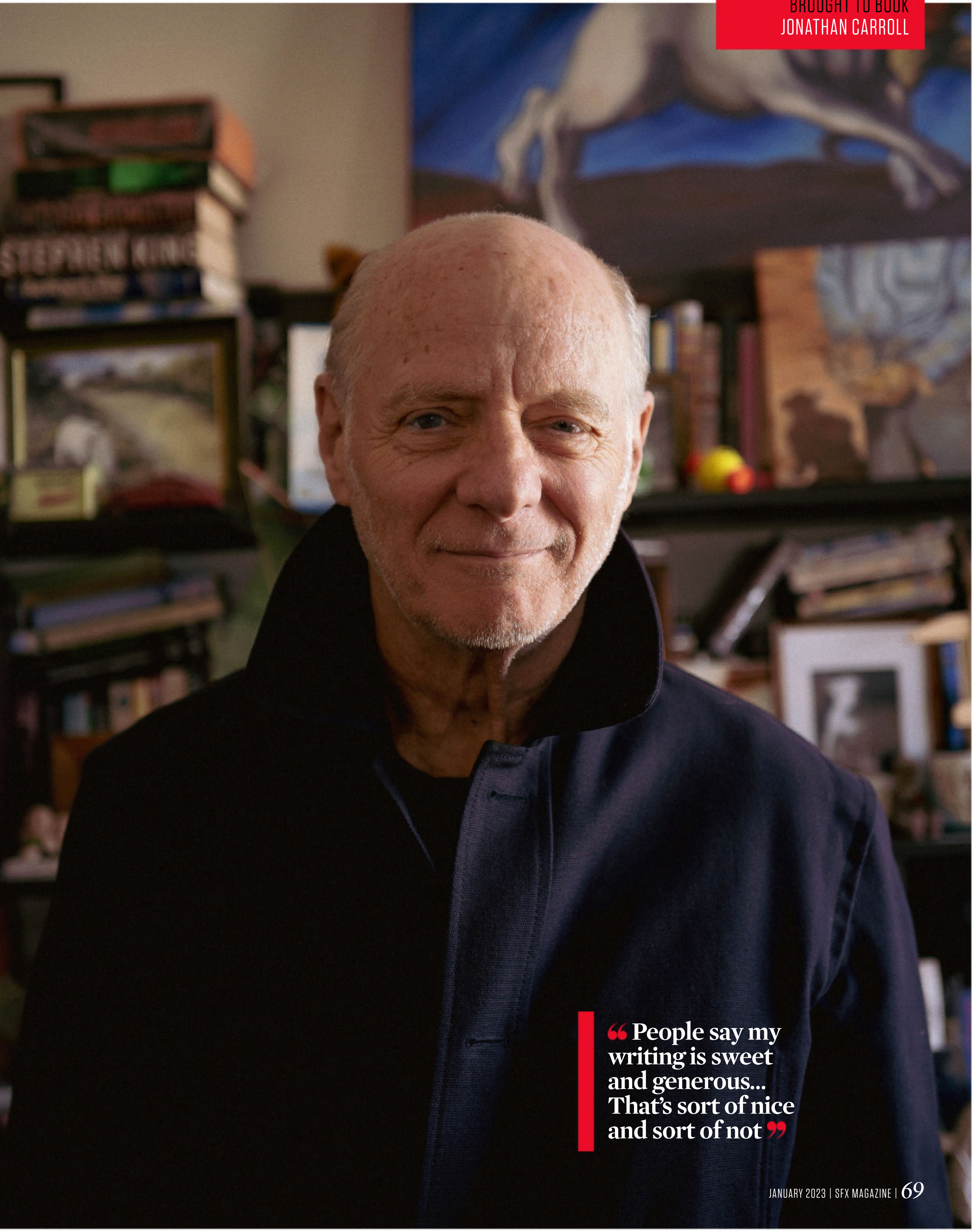
After university, he became a teacher, moving to Vienna in the '70s because he and his wife wanted to travel. He also got job offers from institutions in Beirut and Tehran, both places that soon imploded because of political issues, so it was a fortunate choice. He stayed. He made a vow that he would quit teaching when he made enough from writing, a moment that occurred in the middle of the '80s. "I think I took an advance on a book once," he says, "because I didn't want it to be pressured." Writing for him was, and remains, "always a pleasure".

Nevertheless, he hasn't always been primarily a novelist. For a couple of years, he tried following his father's trade as a screenwriter in LA. "If anyone who has ever been in Hollywood has ever told you a story about Hollywood, it's true," he says. By way of an example, he tells the story of being sent off by his agent to see "a very famous producer" whose office was filled with so many exotic flowers that it was like "a tropical rainforest".

Ushered into the producer's inner sanctum, he found him cursing down the phone. Then he stopped mid-conversation, smiled and strode across the room. "He grabbed me and said, 'That's a beautiful shirt, where did you get that shirt?' Then he said, 'Who's this? Oh, yeah, sit down.' The meeting came to nothing."

He left Hollywood because he's "phobic" about earthquakes, something that was confirmed when he was in California for the 1994 Northridge earthquake. He doesn't regret his time in Tinseltown, though. "I met a lot of really interesting people, and nobody is as sharp and funny as movie people," he says. But professionally, it wasn't right for him. "I'm a book writer and not a movie writer." ●

Mr Breakfast is published by Melville House on 19 January.



> "People say my writing is sweet and generous... That's sort of nice and sort of not"

☆☆☆☆☆

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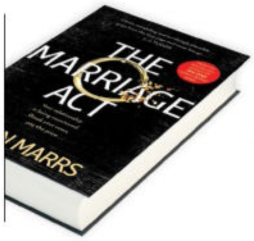

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AVATAR: THE WAY OF WATER

A sea change

★★★★☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!
PG | **192 minutes**
Director **James Cameron**
Cast **Sam Worthington, Zoe Saldaña, Sigourney Weaver, Kate Winslet, Stephen Lang, Cliff Curtis**

Avatar: The Way Of Water starts with some scene-setting: sweeping shots of Pandora's floating mountains, dangerous jungles, and sprawling oceans. As Stephen Lang's Colonel Quaritch declared 13 years ago: "We're not in Kansas any more." In fact, despite having died from two arrows through the chest, Quaritch repeats the line in the sequel – but now he's a blue Na'vi. There's a lot to catch up on...

Jake Sully (Sam Worthington), the human-turned-Na'vi who we last saw beating his former species out of Pandora, has started a family with his beloved Neytiri (Zoe Saldana). They have two sons, a daughter, and an adopted human boy. The Sullys have also taken in a daughter born of Dr Grace Augustine's deceased avatar (with both mother and child played by Sigourney Weaver). Because, as we all know, no one ever really dies in sci-fi.

After a few years of peace (or 10 minutes of screen time), the Sky People are back on Pandora and destroying its forests. Earth, it turns out, has become uninhabitable, and its people are seeking a new world to pillage. There's just one problem: the natives are still angry. So the invading humans set out to kill Jake Sully in the hope of ending the rebellions.

They install Quaritch's memories into a Na'vi body (a "recombinant") in order to utilise his knowledge of Pandora. There's frankly an awful lot of exposition as we catch up on what's happened in the decade since the original *Avatar*, but once we're finally up to speed, director James Cameron starts doing what he does best: producing explosive, breathless, high-stakes action anchored by unparalleled CG.

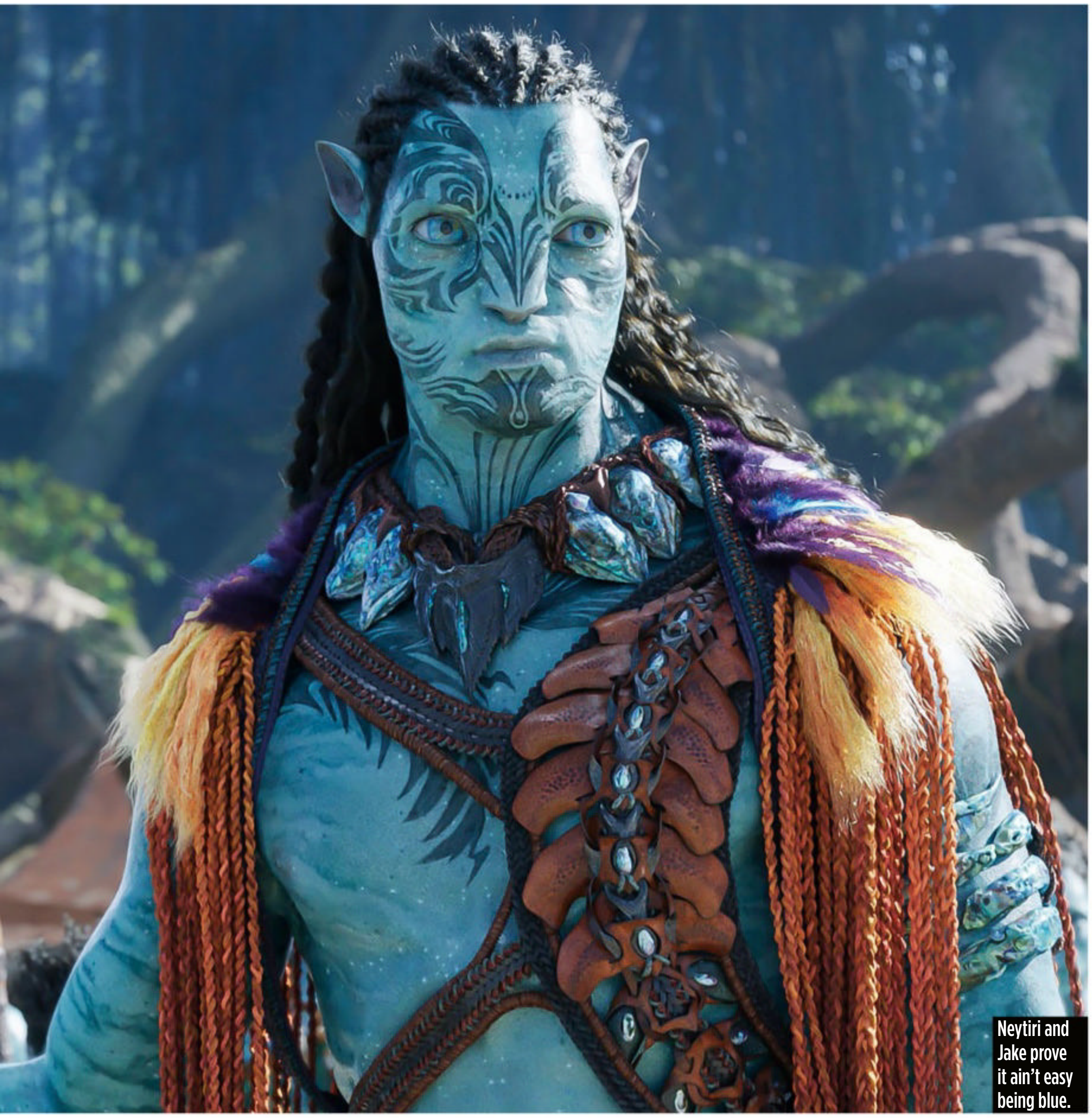
While the marketing for the film has been all about water, the first time we see the ocean (other than during the opening montage) comes an hour in, after the Sullys are forced from their home and must seek sanctuary with the sea clans. You need that hour, though, just to get used to the way the movie looks.

"Race you to the shops!" "Oh grow up."

Cameron filmed certain sections at 48 frames a second to minimise screen strobing, resulting in some miraculously smooth and immersive scenes. But – and it's a big but – the illusion is broken every time a human steps on-screen. There's a fluidity to human motion here that's weirdly unnatural, making the expensive and impressive CG suddenly look like a PlayStation 2 game. It's not quite *The Hobbit* again, but it comes close in places.

> **"Explosive, breathless, high-stakes action with unparalleled CG"**

Come the ocean scenes, when the humans are gone and the underwater world becomes home, the film blossoms. Like the first *Avatar*, the sequel slowly submerges us in this new world as Cameron does some sublime



Neytiri and Jake prove it ain't easy being blue.

world-building. There are extended sequences of teenagers hanging out with whales, fathers getting annoyed at their sons and hair tendrils connecting with ancestral trees. When the action does ramp up again during the third hour, the film climaxes with a dazzling sequence that plays like a run-through of Cameron's greatest hits: *Aliens*, *The Abyss* and especially *Titanic*.

It's a thrilling finale that, just when you think it's over, keeps going, the tension rising and rising until it becomes almost unbearable – all rooted in emotion and sentimentality that's never overwrought.

Structurally, the story feels more akin to a television show than a film; there's no definitive main character, with Cameron splitting his attention between Jake, Quaritch and the kids. Worthington and Lang are highlights, while Weaver's casting as a teenager is distracting, the CG struggling to cover up her decades of worldly experience.

There's also a disappointing lack of Zoe Saldaña's Neytiri, so brilliant in the original, while Kate Winslet's newcomer Ronal barely registers (and that's to say nothing of cameo roles for Edie Falco and Jemaine Clement).

Despite these flaws, when you give in to *The Way Of Water* it's hypnotic. Thirteen years ago, there were reports of cinemagoers having anxiety attacks after leaving multiplexes, wishing they could go back to Pandora. Those wishes have now been granted. See this on the biggest screen you can – you won't be in Kansas any more. **Jack Shepherd**

i Kate Winslet broke Tom Cruise's record for longest-held breath while shooting a scene: just over seven minutes underwater.

MIND PROBE

STEPHEN LANG

Colonel Quaritch in *Avatar: The Way Of Water*

KARWAI TANG/WIREIMAGE

How has performance capture evolved since the first *Avatar*?

→ Some of the facial capture has certainly evolved, but I don't think the mocap suits have changed much in 13 years! I think the major technical innovation between *Avatar* and *The Way Of Water* is the underwater performance capture. It was impossible to conceive how to do that until Jim [Cameron] decided, "Well, we've got to do it. Let's figure out how."

Quaritch is the antagonist in *Avatar*, but some people see him as the hero. How do you regard the character and the public's response to him?

→ There are characters that you love to hate and perhaps he's one of those. There are also characters you hate yourself for loving, and maybe he's that for some people, too. He's got qualities that are of interest, and some of them are laudable – he's got his own brand of courage and he's extremely loyal. Are there people who like him *because* he hates the Na'vi? Yeah, I guess there are, but I would not say that Quaritch is a racist. Mission-oriented is what he is. **RE**

ENYS MEN

Stone Island

★★★★★

RELEASED 13 JANUARY

15 | **91 minutes**

Director **Mark Jenkin**

Cast **Mary Woodvine, Edward Rowe, Flo Crowe, John Woodvine**

How do you feel about walking out of the cinema scratching your head? Your answer will define your response to Mark Jenkin's follow-up to *Bait*.

There are various reasons why a film might puzzle viewers. It may be incoherently plotted, with no internal logic. Then there are films that don't spell things out, choosing to work by subtle insinuations; where apprehending meaning is like trying to wrap your arms around a phantom. *Enys Men* falls in the latter camp. While it will (with good reason) be bracketed as folk horror, don't expect a linear presentation of, say, an old Cornish folk tale.

What solid data we have can be quickly detailed. It's set in 1973 (and looks like it could have been shot then). An unnamed volunteer, living on an island off the Cornish coast, follows a daily routine so repetitive that it almost acquires the quality of ritual. She observes flowers on a cliff's edge, and logs her observations. Day after day, she pencils "No change". Then one day, there's a lichen on the petals…

The status of much else here is unclear. There are visitations by figures from the past – tin miners and young girls bearing hawthorn branches; a girl falls from a side-roof of the cottage; a standing stone behaves strangely; the Volunteer finds a fragment of boat wreckage embedded in the cliff. This much could serve as a broad explanation: on this island, time is not operating in the manner we usually perceive it. Past and future are intruding on the present – if such distinctions aren't arbitrary… But even this vague schema doesn't satisfactorily cover it all.

It's a closed-mouthed film, whose withholding of dialogue generates tension, and one which prompts many questions. Who sent the Volunteer? What's her relation to the girl? How might her reading (environmentalist tract *A Blueprint For Survival*) help us to interpret events? What's the nature of the lichen? Why the lack of reaction to a harbinger of death?

It's a film which feels held together by rhymes and repetition, and which places you in such a questioning state of mind that after a while every random close-up – a crack in the wall; the Volunteer's fingers; water dripping from a Mackintosh – begins to seem imbued with potential meaning as you scan for clues. Jenkin proves to be an adept beachcomber of images, gathering a jutting spur of rusted metal here, ants hoisting a leaf there.

> "There are visitations by figures from the past"

Even if you find the effect frustrating rather than fascinating, there's no denying the beauty he captures in his vibrant, grainy 16mm footage of this rugged landscape: seabirds riding the air currents; the dying sun colouring the sea; moorland rippling like water as the wind plays over it. A work of eerie, absorbing and perhaps ultimately unfathomable enigma, it induces a pleasurable mystification. **Ian Berriman**

Her dad was in *An American Werewolf In London*. FACT.

i The prop stone replica now resides in a reclamation yard owned by a production designer. It's going on tour with the film!

APOCALYPSE KERNOW

Four more Cornish horror films

THE UNINVITED (1944)

In this haunted house tale, two siblings (Ray Milland and Ruth Hussey) buy an abandoned pile on a Cornish cliff. Key features: mysterious sobbing sounds in the night, and a room where flowers instantly wilt…

THE PLAGUE OF THE ZOMBIES (1966)

André Morrell's professor investigates deaths in a Cornish village in this Hammer horror, finding empty graves in the cemetery. Turns out the squire mastered voodoo in Haiti, and is assembling a zombie workforce for his tin mine!

CRUCIBLE OF TERROR (1971)

DJ Mike Raven fell for Cornwall in the late-'60s, moving to a 17th century cottage in Lesnewth, then a sheep farm on Bodmin Moor. This shocker (filmed around Blue Hills near St Agnes) casts him as a sculptor who encases a woman in plaster, then pours in molten bronze.

DISCIPLE OF DEATH (1972)

Raven also toplines this load of old rubbish, shot around Boscastle. Revived when blood is dripped on a grave, his "Stranger" cuts out virgins' hearts, turning them into zombie-like slaves of Satan.

PIGGY

The whole hog

★★★★½

RELEASED 6 JANUARY

18 | **90 minutes**

Director **Carlota Pereda**

Cast **Laura Galán, Carmen Machi, Irene Ferreiro, Camille Aguilar**

Much of this Spanish-language horror is hard to watch, and not just the impressively gory scenes, but the teenage bullying our protagonist faces from her fat-phobic peers, which is bone-chillingly cruel and rings depressingly true.

Laura Galán gives a memorable performance as the tormented young heroine Sara, who lives in an oppressive small town filled with bitchy gossips and an intolerance for anyone being, or looking, different. Home offers little respite either, with a mother who puts her down at every opportunity.

Things take a turn when, having suffered a public humiliation from three fellow teenage girls, Sara then watches them being taken by a potential serial killer. The question then becomes whether to help her tormentors or view their captor as an ally. The film makes it clear which of these two are considered the greater evil.

Piggy's grisly satire is simple but extremely effective. Like *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* before it, its images have a multi-sensory quality; you can almost feel the oppressive summer heat, and smell the sweat. Most impressively, Carlota Pereda creates a striking character study that builds to grand questions around revenge and morality, with a nasty flourish. **Leila Latif**

i Pereda's original short ended with the teens being kidnapped; suffice to say the body count is higher in the feature!

"You've got red on –" "Don't. Just *don't*."

STRANGE WORLD

Living in a land down under

★★★½☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

PG | **102 minutes**

Director **Don Hall**

Cast **Jake Gyllenhaal, Dennis Quaid, Gabrielle Union, Jaboukie Young-White**

Disney hasn't tended to dip into the straightforward adventure genre much since the one-two flame-out of *Atlantis: The Lost Empire* and *Treasure Planet*. So it's encouraging that the company chose to take a gamble on *Strange World*, the latest from *Raya And The Last Dragon* collaborators Don Hall and Qui Nguyen. Jake Gyllenhaal voices Searcher Clade, who grew up excited to follow in the adventurous footsteps of his explorer father Jaeger (Dennis Quaid). But a key father-son bonding trip ends in bitterness when Searcher discovers energy-giving plants that push the technological advancement of the community of Avalonia.

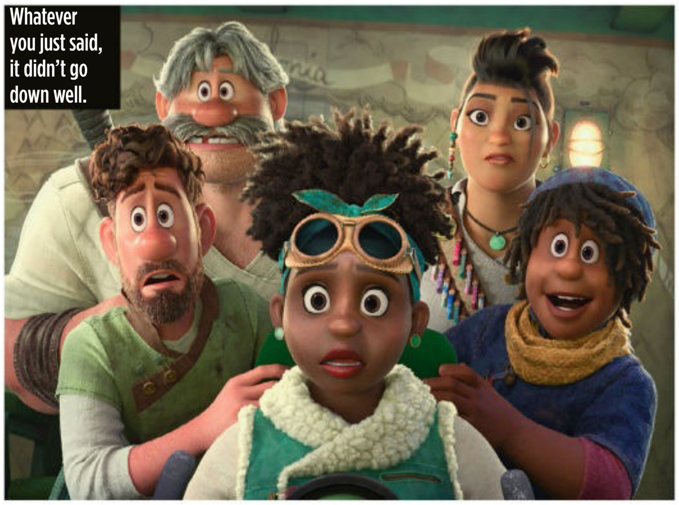
Jaeger belittles the breakthrough, choosing to leave and keep looking for what lies beyond the mountains that ring their home. Searcher commits to being a farmer – at least until a threat to the plants prompts him to take up dad's mantle and quest for a fix.

Though its storytelling is driven by those trope-heavy daddy issues, *Strange World*'s thrills are more visual, as Searcher discovers a subterranean place filled with weird creatures. The designs are impressive and have a reason to exist in the narrative. Even creatures that were clearly created to sell more toys have a point. Fans of Jules Verne, HG Wells and Terry Pratchett, meanwhile, will happily sink into the distinctly steampunk vibe.

Some refreshingly progressive character work – Searcher's son Ethan (Jaboukie Young-White) is gay, which goes without comment or issue – means this is a step ahead of even other recent Disney releases, and while the basic concept might not be the most original, the pulpy vibe boosts the entertainment value higher than it might otherwise be.

James White

> **“This is a step ahead of even other recent Disney releases”**



Whatever you just said, it didn't go down well.

i This is Jake Gyllenhaal and Dennis Quaid's second time as cinematic father and son following *The Day After Tomorrow*.

“*Minecraft* looks great in 32K resolution!”

DRINKING GAME

Knock back a beverage of your choice every time…

- **Flynne refers to some future folk as “y’all”.**
- **Someone drops jargon like Klepts, Polts, Koids, Neoprims or haptics.**
- **You see a famous London landmark like Buckingham Palace or Trafalgar Square.**

- **Flynne is riding her electric bicycle.**
- **Wilf Netherton is wearing a new matching shirt/tie combo.**
- **A British person drinks a cup of tea.**
- **Someone changes a setting by making a hand gesture.**

THE PERIPHERAL Season One

In like Flynne

★★★★☆

UK/US **Prime Video, streaming now**

Showrunner **Scott B Smith**

Cast **Chloë Grace Moretz, Gary Carr, Jack Reynor, JJ Feild**

EPISODES 1.01-1.08 **It’s faintly** appalling that it’s taken 32 years from *Neuromancer*’s publication for any of William Gibson’s bibliography to come to TV – until now, the nearest we got were the *X-Files* episodes he co-wrote either side of the millennium. Now it’s finally happened, with this adaptation of his 2014 novel. The results are by turns bewildering and crowd-pleasing, with audacious concepts wedded to kickass action set-pieces.

Or should that be *Kick-Ass* action set-pieces? Former Hitgirl Chloë Grace Moretz is Flynne Fisher, an expert gamer from small-town North Carolina, 2032. When her army vet brother Burton is offered a gig beta-testing a new VR sim, she takes his place, donning a headset to enter a scenario set in London, 2099. It’s breathtakingly immersive, with good reason: Flynn isn’t just playing a character but, via quantum tunnelling, controlling a robotic avatar (a peripheral) that physically exists in the future.

Executive-produced by *Westworld*’s Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy, the show picks and chooses from the book, retaining core concepts like the Jackpot (a multinodal apocalypse looming in the future) and key characters (Flynn, Burton, his triple-amputee buddy Conner, kleptocrat Lev Zubov, drug baron Corbell Pickett) while replacing much of the specific incident. The mission which kick-starts the whole plot is entirely different, for example.

It’s an immaculately crafted series, with some stunningly ornate production design in the future-London segments. And it’s crammed with fascinating technological developments, from the “haptics” which allow soldiers to connect with one another, to the percussion gun which hits its targets with a “sonic punch” and the encryption tech which converts live conversations into impenetrable gibberish (thankfully, we’re given subtitles).

Some viewers may feel like the Brits are speaking via encryption too; grandiloquent verbiage is de rigueur in 2099, especially when coolly fencing with an opponent. Such exchanges are deliciously arch, to the point of high camp, but the cast often struggle to deliver their dialogue in a naturalistic manner. To paraphrase Harrison Ford: you can type this script, but you sure can’t say it.

On occasion, action sequences seem to occur merely to tick the “epic scrap” box. And the notion of “stubs” – “forks in causality” that create alternate realities – is under-explained, the rules around them difficult to wrap your head around. This results in a decidedly baffling climax to the season.

The Peripheral remains a sim worth plugging into, though: a stylish, offbeat series which riffs on Gibson’s work, expanding his world and threading in additional threats and romantic subplots without calamitously dumbing things down. **Ian Berriman**

i Gibson’s 2016 comic *Archangel* started out as a WW2-era “Nazi flying saucers” pitch to a German television producer.

THE KINGDOM: EXODUS

Lars von Trier's Darkplace

The only pic we can show from the *SFX* Christmas do.

★★★★½

UK **MUBI, streaming now**

Creator **Lars von Trier**

Cast **Bodil Jørgensen, Nicolas Bro, Mikael Persbrandt, Lars Mikkelsen, Tuva Novotny**

EPISODES 3.01-3.05 **How much does** Lars von Trier love *Twin Peaks*? Going by *Kingdom: Exodus*, the answer is *a lot*. Just as the first two seasons of his cult supernatural hospital drama owed an acknowledged debt to Lynch and Frost's masterpiece, this belated third run (25 years later, of course) feels like a companion piece to *The Return*.

The Kingdom hospital is built on top of Copenhagen's old bleaching ponds, a superstitious, fog-shrouded realm. It was meant to be a place of science and rationality, but the cracks are starting to show. There are tremors in the earth, sinister doppelgangers on the wards and – just possibly – something truly evil stalking the corridors.

With many of the original cast no longer with us, von Trier introduces a new array of obnoxious surgeons (most notably Mikael Persbrandt's Helmer Jr) and more sympathetic nurses and orderlies. The lines between reality and fiction are blurred by the presence of Karen (Bodil Jørgensen), an elderly patient who watched the first two seasons of the show and now exists within its reality. While she confronts the darkness at the heart of the building, Helmer finds himself embroiled in various workplace scandals that operate on the level of increasingly surreal farce.

> “Comparatively speaking, it's kind of a crowd-pleaser”

Trier's work is sometimes characterised by a certain try-hard edginess. What a delight then that *Kingdom: Exodus* – while far from mainstream – is (comparatively speaking) kind of a crowd-pleaser. It's bizarre, hilarious, genuinely creepy and fearsomely entertaining. **Will Salmon**

i Trier initially planned to return to the series after season two, but the deaths of several cast ended it prematurely.

THE RIG Series One

Anything but boring

“Oh god... pretty sure I left the oven on.”

★★★★☆

UK/US **Prime Video, 6 January**

Creator **David Macpherson**

Cast **Martin Compston, Mark Bonnar, Rochenda Sandall, Owen Teale**

EPISODES 1.01-1.06 **Given the number** of *Line Of Duty* alumni here (Martin Compston! Mark Bonnar! Rochenda Sandall! Owen Teale!) – and its gritty, greasy, *Vigil*-like setting, you'd be forgiven – certainly for the first half hour at least – for thinking that *The Rig* has Jed Mercurio's fingerprints all over it.

But as the plot settles in, it becomes clear that writer David Macpherson's creative reference points are more horror than white-knuckle TV thriller, and by its end *The Rig* feels more like some lost John Carpenter movie. Or John Carpenter if he came from Aberdeenshire, anyway.

It's amazing, really, that British TV has waited this long to set a big-time drama on an oil rig. With all those workers living on top of each other in such an intense pressure cooker environment, it'd be dramatic enough even without the added layer of the end of life on Earth as we know it – yes, you can't accuse Macpherson of low-stakes drama here. What looks, at the beginning of the series, like a deadly but localised threat ends up being as apocalyptic as a Russell T Davies *Doctor Who* season finale.

> “Its reference points are more horror than white-knuckle TV thriller”

“We know more about the surface of the moon than we do the bottom of the ocean,” says Kinloch Bravo's improbably wise chef, and it appears that's true. Macpherson's central idea feels like something Nigel Kneale might have come up with, except given an extra 21st century environmental punch.

It's a shame that Amazon announced a second series before this one even started, meaning that we know not to expect a full stop here. The finale points to a massive expansion of the story. But *The Rig* works because of its one-location focus; is series two destined to be a common or garden end-of-the-world drama? Time will tell. **Steve O'Brien**

i *The Rig* was shot at FirstStage Studios in Leith. Formerly a wave power plant, it was co-founded by Jason Connery.

THE WITCHER: BLOOD ORIGIN

Prequel opportunities

★★★★☆

UK/US **Netflix, streaming now**

Showrunner **Declan de Barra**

Cast **Sophia Brown, Laurence O'Fuarain, Michelle Yeoh, Mirren Mack**

EPISODES 1.01-1.04 **Big-budget** fantasy prequels were all the rage in 2022, but this *Witcher* spin-off wields a power *House Of The Dragon* and *The Rings Of Power* can only dream of: brevity.

Keeping things short and to the point isn't always fashionable in realms of magic and monsters, but *Blood Origin*'s pacy, highly bingeable four-episode arc is its greatest strength. The fact that it's set around 1,200 years before Geralt of Rivia's monster-slaying exploits is also a massive plus. *Blood Origin*'s plot and characters are so many generations removed from the parent show that the curse which afflicts most prequels – the challenge of maintaining suspense in a story whose outcome is never in doubt – is easily sidestepped.

Fans of Andrzej Sapkowski's original *The Witcher* books, videogames and TV show will already know that the Elves were once the dominant species on the Continent – by Geralt's time, they've become an oppressed minority – and *Blood Origin* shows their civilisation at the height of its power. Pretty much the only thing they have in common with the wise, ethereal beings of Tolkien's Middle-earth, however, is the shape of their ears, because in *The Witcher* Elves are every bit as varied, flawed and mortal as humans are.

The *Game Of Thrones*-esque coup that plunges the Continent into (literal) Chaos is the ideal catalyst to bring together an unlikely band of six Elves and a Dwarf (humans are yet to arrive in the Continent) on an old-school fantasy quest. Their mission? To save the world from a rogue mage (played with impressive menace by Lenny Henry) and some very angry beasts.

This fellowship may be of the dysfunctional variety, but there's plenty of fun to be had watching them grow into a coherent unit. In an era of sequels and epic multi-season storylines, it's refreshing to see entire character arcs play out across the running time of a single *Lord Of The Rings* movie. And even though *Blood Origin* doesn't really find its feet until episode two, the story still finds time for romance, betrayal and the brutal genesis of the first ever Witcher. Let's just say the prototype model lacks Geralt's poise and good manners...

> **“Elves are every bit as varied, flawed and mortal as humans”**

Crucially, there's enough crossover with the original show's mythology that you never feel like you've materialised in a different universe. As in *Rogue One*, the characters here are destined to be footnotes in the history of the Continent, but their actions – and their connection to the infamous Conjunction of the Spheres – seem set to have major implications when *The Witcher* returns for its third season in 2023. *Blood Origin* is arguably Netflix's most satisfying trip to the Continent so far. **Richard Edwards**

“Um... is your horse wearing a wig? Just asking.”

i Sapkowski didn't explain the Conjunction of the Spheres in his *Witcher* novels. The backstory was created for *Blood Origin*.

COUNT MAGNUS

★★★½☆

UK **BBC Two, now on iPlayer**

Director **Mark Gatiss**

Cast **Jason Watkins, MyAnna Buring, Max Bremer, Allan Corduner**

Another Christmas, another MR James tale, and another very solid adaptation by Mark Gatiss.

First published in 1904, James's short story recounts the fate of a Mr Wroxall, whose researches among the papers in a Swedish manor house unearth a *very* dark sheep in the family: Magnus de la Gardie, renowned locally for his cruelty, and for rumours that he brought something back from a Satanic “Black Pilgrimage”. Wroxall's fascination with his mausoleum does not end well...

Jason Hawkins brings wry humour to his portrayal of Wroxall – a slightly fatuous fellow, prone to making up little songs. And Gatiss makes the process of adaptation look effortless – although given that the original tale features not a single line of direct speech, it surely wasn't.

He makes good choices all round, from spelling out the significance of Chorazin for a less Bible-literate age to deciding to show (rather than merely report) the tale's most gruesome moment. And while the narration at first seems rather superfluous, it ultimately turns out to be in service of a delicious twist.

The Swedish setting never entirely convinces, and it's not on a par with the best of the '70s series (or last year's *The Mezzotint*), but this remains one festive tradition which – unlike dates and Cliff Richard – shows no signs of becoming tiresome. **Ian Berriman**

1899 Season One

The Voyage Of The Brain Shredder

★★★★☆

UK/US **Netflix, streaming now**

Showrunners **Jantje Friese, Baran bo Odar**

Cast **Emily Beecham, Andreas Pietschmann, Aneurin Barnard, Isabella Wei**

EPISODES 1.01-1.06 **Set in 1889, on** a cruise ship full of migrants running from their pasts, travelling from Europe to America… No, hang on.

This is the new series from the writer/director team that gave us the brain-befuddling sci-fi noir *Dark*, so it shouldn't surprise you that no part of that opening statement is necessarily true. And that's not really a spoiler, because if you're part of the target audience for this show, you'll presumably be picking up the clues that *all is not what it seems* from the opening scene.

A little bit *Lost*, a little bit *The Matrix*, a little bit *Doctor Who*, a little bit *Sucker Punch*, a little bit *Shutter Island*, *1899* starts out as a supernatural thriller and then turns into a bigger puzzle than even the twisty-turny time travel shenanigans of *Dark*, engaging in some big existential questions.

Elegant and atmospheric, with an opulent production design that drips with signs and symbols, its slow-burn pace is punctuated by WTF revelations that keep drawing you in. And every time you think you've worked out which well-worn horror/sci-fi clichéd denouement it's heading for, it changes direction.

> **“Elegant and atmospheric, with an opulent production design”**

Bill & Ted's Existential Angst Adventure.

The international cast is very impressive, and the series is best watched with subtitles, with all the characters speaking in their native languages (rather than the dubbed English version), because the difficulties of communication and understanding are a key theme here. The soundtrack adds to the exquisite weirdness, both through the choice of classic pop songs that play over the climactic events of each episode and Ben Frost's quirky, discordant score.

Don't expect to get all the answers. Do expect a second season. And a whole lot more questions… **Dave Golder**

i *1899*'s vast Volume stage was built at Babelsberg Studios near Berlin, where Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* was filmed.

THE WALKING DEAD Season 11

Milton's Paradise Lost

★★★★☆

UK **Disney+ streaming now**

US **AMC, streaming now**

Showrunner **Angela Kang**

Cast **Norman Reedus, Melissa McBride, Lauren Cohan, Josh McDermitt**

EPISODES 11.01-11.24 **And so we come** to the end of a long and bumpy road. *The Walking Dead* has been on air for 12 years and 177 episodes. That's an astonishing achievement for any TV show, let alone one that has endured multiple showrunner changes and – let's be honest – some creative wobbles along the way. Happily, season 11 continues the series' Angela Kang-driven second wind, delivering some pleasingly full-blooded drama.

The survivors must reckon with the threat posed by the murderous, cult-like Reapers and a smarter, stronger variant of Walker. But their biggest challenge comes in the form of the Commonwealth and its ruthless governor, Pamela Milton (Laila Robins). The glimpses we get into the workings of this apparent paradise are believably murky (including labour camps and a corrupt justice system), with Milton making for a suitably bureaucratic final villain.

As ever with late-period *Walking Dead*, Negan (Jeffrey Dean Morgan) is the most compelling character. The tension between him and Maggie (Lauren Cohan) – the wife of Glenn, whom he murdered, let's not forget – rumbles beneath the surface of the season. It's to the show's credit that, while Negan is sincere in his desire to make amends, the show never forces an unlikely reconciliation. Instead, it lingers on the awkward pain both characters are feeling while being forced to live and work together.

“I'll be honest with you, I'm a bit tired now.”

Final episode “Rest In Peace” wraps things up largely satisfactorily. There are main character deaths, big explosions, and closure for some of the characters. For a show that has lived so long in the darkness, there's a genuine catharsis in learning that at least *some* of these poor bastards get something close to a happy ending. **Will Salmon**

i An alternative ending scene – set many years into the future – was shot but not used. Something for the Blu-ray!

“Woke up this morning, feeling so blue.”

JU-ON THE GRUDGE COLLECTION

House Of The Rising Son

★★★★☆ EXTRAS ★★★★☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

2000-2009 | 15 | Blu-ray (4K/standard)

Directors **Takashi Shimizu, Mari Asato, Ryuta Miyake**

Cast **Megumi Okina, Misaki Ito, Takashi Matsuyama, Takako Fuji**

Second only to *Ring* in terms of crossing over to a Western audience, *Ju-On* was a key title in the Japanese horror boom of the ‘00s. It’s a measure of its success that this six-film box set only covers a fraction of the franchise.

Its ingenuity lies in the fact that it’s conceptually simple, but structurally complex. The central conceit is basic: violent deaths in a location create a curse; visitors spread said curse to their own homes and workplaces. Cue pale-faced ghosts, an eerie elongated croaking noise, and shots of people sensing something looming behind them and then turning *veeeery* slowly. Characters are not even safe while tucked under their duvet.

Yet the jumbled chronology and way events are revisited from different perspectives call for a little mental agility. Repetition, stillness, and a lack of ornament are among its weapons. It’s centred on an unremarkable family home – one whose staircase you quickly learn to dread the sight of, given the likelihood that a crawling corpse will make a ghastly scuttling descent.

Ju-On 2 doesn’t mess with the formula, bringing back the house, ghost boy Toshio, and his murdered mother Kayako. This time, events ripple out from a visit by a TV crew (they resist the temptation to get meta). What could have been a pointless retread includes possibly the most chilling chapter in the saga – one where we realise that sights and sounds we experienced earlier were echoes of future deaths. We wonder if Mike Flanagan is a fan...

These theatrically-released features weren’t the first, though – they were preceded by two “V-cinema” (direct to video) films, shot together over nine days in 2000. *Ju-On: The Curse*’s technical qualities are rather off-putting (everything looks either dingy or over-lit), and it inspires some unintentional laughter (a “missing jawbone” video effect really isn’t up to scratch). Still, it’s interesting to see which ideas were retained for future iterations and which were dropped (like the use of Dutch angles). *Ju-On: The Curse 2* is a frustrating watch, since two of its six chapters (about 43% of the total duration) are simply repeated from the first film. What a swizz.

Takashi Shimizu passed the baton to other directors for two hour-long tenth anniversary entries. Accurately described by its helmer as an “adjunct story”, *Ju-On: Black Ghost* is decent, but could easily have been a *Malignant*-style standalone about a girl and her unborn twin. Don’t expect to see this on Netflix anytime soon, given that its ghost is *literally* jet black... *Ju-On: White Ghost* has uncanny moments, but also those that are distasteful and absurd. It’s centred on a family killer who’s a child abuser, and the grim extremity of the murders belongs in another franchise. It’s also impossible to react to its central spook – a ghostly granny clutching a basketball – with anything but snorts of derision.

Extras The newly remastered *Ju-On* – presented on both 4K and regular Blu-ray discs – fares best. Brand new: a featurette by Japanese cinema experts Tom Mes and Zack Davisson (27 minutes); interviews with Shimizu (14 minutes) and actor Takako Fuji (13 minutes); commentary by film historian David Kalat. Archival goodies include an old commentary by Sam Raimi (who produced the US remake) and his pal Scott Spiegel, interviews with Shimizu and two of his cast (total 59 minutes), 15-minutes of on-set interviews, 11 minutes of deleted scenes, about an hour of behind-the-scenes footage, and two “true-life tales” (11 minutes).

> **“Characters are not even safe tucked under their duvet”**

The one fresh extra on *Ju-On 2* is a yack track by scholar Raechel Dumas and critic Jasper Sharp. Otherwise, it’s regulation archival fare: Shimizu interview (28 minutes); on-set interviews (24 minutes); deleted scenes (nine minutes); behind-the-scenes footage (51 minutes); premiere footage (16 minutes).

The Shimizu films all have very short introductions; *Black Ghost* gets one too, as well as a new interview with director Mari Asato (11 minutes). Plus: trailers; galleries; 24 art cards; reversible poster; booklet. **Ian Berriman**

i Not included here: two 1998 shorts by Shimizu which were forerunners to the series: “Katasumi” and “4444444444”.

THE MUNSTERS

★★½☆☆ EXTRAS ★★★☆☆

RELEASED 9 JANUARY

2022 | PG | Blu-ray/DVD

Director **Rob Zombie**

Cast **Sheri Moon Zombie, Jeff Daniel Phillips, Daniel Roebuck, Sylvester McCoy**

Known for a gnarly noughties reboot of the *Halloween* franchise among other things, director and musician Rob Zombie now exhumes *The Munsters*, rivals to the Addams Family as top ghouls of sitcomland.

It's a creaky prequel to the beloved '60s TV show, charting Herman's creation, his courtship with goth vampiress Lily and their move to undesres 1313 Mockingbird Lane (Eddie and Marilyn Munster are missing from the mix).

Zombie drenches it all in colour, aiming for a psychotronic, pop art vibe very different to the monochrome aesthetic of the original. While there's craft on display – sets, prosthetics and lighting more than pull their weight – it's a sluggish watch, missing the wit and pep of the '60s series. Yes, the trick-or-treat trappings are fun, but at times it feels like a morgue for gags, where wannabe zingers get slabbed and tagged.

Between this and infamous '80s reboot *The Munsters Today* you imagine Hollywood might think twice before disturbing Grandpa's ancestral crypt again.

Extras Audio commentary from Rob Zombie, and a genuinely behind-the-scenes documentary (61 minutes) that delivers a fly-on-the-wall overview of the production, including an interesting peek at the make-up tests. Plus: trailer.

Nick Setchfield

"Could you pass the soap? Actually, never mind."

KING KONG

Lange grab

★★★☆☆ EXTRAS ★★★★☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

1976 | 12 | Blu-ray (standard/4K)/DVD/download

Director **John Guillermin**

Cast **Jeff Bridges, Jessica Lange, Charles Grodin, Rene Auberjonois**

BLU-RAY DEBUT **"Who the hell do** you think went through there?" demands Jeff Bridges's luxuriantly hirsute hero. "Some guy in an ape suit?"

It may be the most shameless lampshading in Hollywood history, given that the titular star of this colour remake of the 1933 classic (now impressively restored) is indeed some guy in an ape suit. At least, when it's not a giant mechanical paw or an inert, life-sized prop with faulty hydraulics, looming over a crowd of unimpressed extras.

Showman producer Dino De Laurentiis was determined to deliver a supersized '70s epic, roping in *The Towering Inferno*'s John Guillermin to direct. But a clash of tones undoes the movie: *Batman* veteran Lorenzo Semple Jr supplies a winking, wise-ass screenplay – at one point luminous female lead Jessica Lange asks the lovestruck ape for his star sign – while John Barry's elegiac score and the National Geographic gloss of the Hawaiian locations shoot for something nobler.

> **"The titular star of this remake is indeed some guy in an ape suit"**

Extras A choice of commentaries from effects man Rick Baker and film historian Ray Morton. The deleted scenes (16 minutes) prove pretty inconsequential but do provide a little more giant snake action, if that's your bag.

A set of interviews with cast and crew (50 minutes) make for an entertainingly candid watch as war stories are shared about the madness of production, including the time Lange was nearly crushed by Kong's paw. Exclusive to the 4K edition: the extended TV cut (180 minutes, unrestored), and a poster of the new artwork. Plus: trailer. **Nick Setchfield**

i When Meryl Streep went to audition, De Laurentiis commented that she was too ugly. Unfortunately, Streep speaks Italian...

NANNY

★★★★☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

2022 | 15 | SVOD

Director **Nikyatu Jusu**

Cast **Anna Diop, Michelle Monaghan, Sinqua Walls, Morgan Spector**

PRIME VIDEO **Nikyatu Jusu's** debut won the big prize at the most recent Sundance Film Festival, and it's not hard to see why. While there's no shortage of metaphor-heavy horrors out there, Jusu brings a unique east-meets-west perspective, with figures from West African folklore tormenting her protagonist Aisha (Alice Diop) on the streets of Manhattan.

To make matters worse, Aisha is being subjected to as many sociopolitical evils as supernatural ones. She's in New York working as a nanny for a filthy rich white couple with a dysfunctional marriage, poor professional boundaries and an aversion to paying overtime.

While she lovingly cares for their sweet daughter, the injustice of her situation becomes increasingly painful for her; Aisha's young son is back in Senegal and she's struggling to scrape together money so he can join her.

While that may sound unrelentingly miserable, the film is so gorgeously shot, and Diop's performance so witty and sensitive that it feels hopeful, even inspiring.

In the midst of all the terrors, Jusu makes space for romance and magic, with the director lovingly framing Aisha like a luminous goddess – so that even with the haunting visions of evil mermaids and trickster spiders, there's a little optimism at the edges.

Leila Latif

THE OUTER LIMITS

Beast mode

★★★★☆ EXTRAS ★★★★☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

1963-1965 | PG | Blu-ray

Creator **Leslie Stevens**

BLU-RAY DEBUT ***The Outer Limits*** is probably the second most iconic anthology show after *The Twilight Zone*, but there's a reason why Rod Serling's series snagged the lion's share of the *Simpsons* references.

Serling took to sci-fi and fantasy in part to smuggle serious issues past TV executives. The avowed intent of season one producer Joseph Stefano (screenwriter of *Psycho*) was to do the same, but at times his show feels more like flicking through a pile of sci-fi pulps with lurid covers.

That's largely due to his insistence that every episode have what he called a "bear" – an effect which made it memorable. Usually that translates to some weird grotesque, like an ant with a human face, a chicken-faced medallion-man, or an acromegalic mutant from the future. It's a delight to see some big names burdened with absurd make-up and masks: David McCallum with a domed cranium; Warren Oates with gigantic bulging eyes.

There's rarely a doozy of a twist, and with 49-51 minutes the standard duration, you miss the economy of Serling's show. On the plus side, you're spared *The Twilight Zone*'s occasional and invariably tiresome detours into whimsical comedy. And it remains a consistently entertaining series, whose menagerie of monsters reliably proves to be a tempting lure to watch just one more.

Extras Of the 51 episodes on these 11 discs (the box set also includes alternate cuts of the pilot and "The Forms Of Things Unknown"), 40 come with forensic commentaries by TV historians like David J Schow (author of *The Outer Limits Companion*). Schow also contributes 13 minutes of chat discussing the differences in an earlier version of "Unknown".

Otherwise, all of the bonuses are archival – often clearly sourced from old videotapes. A 1993 all-nighter on TNT supplied many of them. As well as 12 episode-specific promos (23 minutes), you get longer versions of interviews shot for them. A 65-minute chat with Joseph Stefano is a must-watch. Actors Cliff Robertson (36 minutes) and Joanna Frank (21 minutes), writer Anthony Lawrence (nine minutes) and the casting director (24 minutes) are also quizzed.

> **“At times it feels more like flicking through a pile of sci-fi pulps”**

Two further highlights are a 2000 PaleyFest panel (73 minutes), whose contributors include five cast and crew (including Stefano, Martin Landau and Oscar-winning cinematographer Conrad Hall), and 10 minutes of behind-the-scenes footage. This includes some precious glimpses of "sand-beasts" being puppeteered on a miniatures stage; commentary by Schow identifies various other models.

Plus: a 12-minute piece made to promote the 1996 revival show; a 23-minute Schow interview from the same period; Penn & Teller's hosting segments from the TNT night; numerous radio and TV spots; a promo for a Schow book; an extensive stills gallery.

Ian Berriman

i Vic Perrin was the "Control Voice". His other roles include Nomad, the space probe in *Star Trek*'s "The Changeling".

"Aaargh, no, not now! I haven't got my face on."

CANNIBAL HOLOCAUST

★★★☆☆ EXTRAS ★★★★☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

1980 | 18 | Blu-ray (4K/standard)

Director **Ruggero Deodato**

Cast **Robert Kerman, Gabriel Yorke, Luca Giorgio Barbareschi, Francesca Ciardi**

Ruggero Deodato's infamous exploitation flick remains highly controversial. Following an American film crew who make contact with a tribe of cannibals, it's an undeniably unpleasant film, which includes deeply unsettling footage of (real) animal cruelty.

On the other hand, the points it's making about media manipulation and Western attitudes towards other cultures still feel relevant. Plus, the second half invents the found footage genre 19 years before *The Blair Witch Project*.

Extras 88 Films' new 4K transfer is stunning, and the disc is stuffed with interviews. Deodato gets a pair of new ones (10 minutes and 25 respectively); there's also an archive piece (12 minutes) exploring an unmade zombie film project. "The Last Cannibal Kings" pits Deodato against Umberto Lenzi (27 minutes), with more archive interviews.

There are also chats with production designer Massimo Antonello Geleng (21 minutes), cinematographer Sergio D'Offizi (47 minutes) and Italian horror expert Marcello Avallone (14 minutes). Plus: commentary by Kim Newman and Barry Forshaw; a lengthy archive Making Of (63 minutes); a single (unrestored) alternate scene (two minutes); trailers; A3 poster; booklet. **Will Salmon**

ALAMY

PRESENTED IN SUPERCOLORISATION

Old shows, new hues

★★★★☆ EXTRAS ★★★★☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

1960-1963 | U | Blu-ray

Creator **Gerry Anderson**

Cast **Nicholas Parsons, Graydon Gould, Paul Maxwell**

BLU-RAY DEBUT ***Stingray* was the** first Gerry Anderson series made in colour, but it's no longer the oldest one you can watch in colour. A digitally colourised version of *Fireball XL5*'s "A Day in the Life Of A Space General" has been available for some years but now it's joined by an episode of Western show *Four Feather Falls*, two of *Supercar* and two more of *XL5* for this HD collection.

While some of the selections may seem oddly esoteric (there's more jazz and less space hardware than you might expect, and an Irish accent that should be reported to the European Court of Human Rights), the colourisation – using colour stills as reference – is impressive. You're left convinced that this is how Gerry Anderson imagined them looking all along, even if occasionally the palette is a little garish – especially the red bits on Supercar, which look potentially radioactive.

Extras Two two-hour long "special presentations" – originally live-streamed events – showcasing the colourised episodes (so, bizarrely, you get some of them twice in the same box set). They're introduced by characters from the shows in a series of corny but cute comedy sketches; *Crime Traveller* gets a namecheck!

You also get some other Gerry Anderson curiosities, including behind-the-scenes footage and two episodes of *You've Never Seen These!* Directed by Anderson, this was a quirky '50s docuseries spotlighting people who do odd things, such as a pub landlord who prides himself on offering the world's worst service and a woman who recreates famous paintings using a typewriter. Crazy times! Plus: a 16-page "SuperColorising book". Get your felt tips out... **Dave Golder**

"Take my hand, come with me baby, to love land."

i Nicholas Parsons won the Tex Tucker role after reading in parts when Anderson visited his wife, actor Denise Bryer.

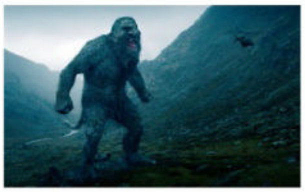
CHRISTMAS BLOODY CHRISTMAS

★★★★☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

2022 | TBC | SVOD

SHUDDER **Heavy metal fan** Tori doesn't have much planned for Christmas Eve bar finishing a bottle of whisky, but her friends convince her to hang out... thereby making her the target of a malfunctioning robot Santa. Drenched in neon lighting with a Goblin-esque score and tons of gore, this isn't for traditionalists, but horror fans looking for a break from sentimental holiday movies will have a ball. **Sarah Dobbs**



TROLL

★★★½☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

2022 | 12 | SVOD

NETFLIX **Before rebooting** *Tomb Raider* in 2018, director Roar Uthaug made his name in his native Norway with natural disaster thriller *The Wave*.

Troll finds him in unnatural disaster mode, as demolition work rouses a towering menace from its underground slumber. It's Fjordzilla, essentially, a Scandi spin on monster-on-the-rampage tropes.

The troll design fuses sinister physicality with a honest whiff of fairy tale, and alongside the obligatory chopper-swatting there's some imaginative use of local lore. **Nick Setchfield**

A WOUNDED FAWN

★★★★☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

2022 | TBC | SVOD

SHUDDER **Greek mythology** and Surrealism (with a capital S) collide in Travis Stevens's accomplished third feature.

Museum curator Meredith is looking forward to a weekend away with her new boyfriend, but the romance sours when she spots an ancient sculpture of the three Furies in his cabin in the woods...

Snappily written and stylishly shot on 16mm, *A Wounded Fawn* balances its spooky metaphysical business with visceral effects work, resulting in some impressively striking imagery. **Sarah Dobbs**

WOLF MANOR

★★☆☆☆ EXTRAS ☆☆☆☆☆

RELEASED 9 JANUARY

2022 | 15 | DVD/download

There's a cute visual gag near the start of this cheap werewolf horror: having made *American Werewolf In London* jokes about a country pub, two city types find themselves in an almost shot-for-shot recreation of the "keep off the moors" sequence. Promisingly, that's followed by a properly gruesome wolf attack.

But the rest of the meagre runtime feels more like a prolonged whinge about the trials of low-budget filmmaking. With no actual story to tell, *Wolf Manor* rather lacks bite.

Extras None. **Sarah Dobbs**

STAR TREK: DISCOVERY Season Four

Anomaly-19

★★★★☆ EXTRAS ★★★½☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

2021-2022 | 12 | Blu-ray/DVD

Showrunners **Alex Kurtzman, Michelle Paradise**

Cast **Sonequa Martin-Green, Anthony Rapp, Doug Jones, Blu del Barrio**

There are few things we can actually thank the pandemic for, but the fact that it gave *Discovery*'s writers extra time to polish the show's fourth season is one of them. The show's first three years were a bumpy mess of brilliant butting up against truly awful, whereas what we have here is at least consistently watchable.

With Disco now under the leadership of Captain Burnham, the crew spend this season chasing a mysterious "anomaly" that's snuffing out planets (essentially an interstellar pandemic). With the future Federation in full swing, the crew long established and the effects, as always, gorgeous, this season is arguably the most solid of them all. Extra kudos goes to David Ajala as Booker, who gets a tasty character arc to devour.

"Really sorry, I had baked beans for dinner."

Extras An extensive season overview (52 minutes) sees the cast and showrunner Michelle Paradise discussing every episode in order. Techheads should enjoy "Creating Space", an in-depth look at the production's new AR Wall virtual set; people who glaze over reading user manuals will be none the wiser after 20 minutes. Featurettes on Covid precautions have dated like milk, but the one here (12 minutes) is fairly interesting, with Wilson Cruz confessing to an anxiety attack and Doug Jones noting that being buried under prosthetics meant he was used to a degree of isolation.

The latest "Being Michael Burnham" featurette (14 minutes) sees Sonequa Martin-Green being so open about her issues that British viewers may feel faintly uncomfortable; expect words like "actualisation" and iPhone footage of sobbing. Plus: commentary on the finale; four minutes of deleted scenes; a gag reel. **Ian Berriman**

i All the signage for the AR Wall virtual set inside *Discovery*'s Toronto studio refers to it as "The Holodeck".

SILENT RUNNING

Out of his tree

★★★★☆ EXTRAS ★★★★☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

1972 | U | Blu-ray (4K/standard)

Director **Douglas Trumbull**

Cast **Bruce Dern, Cliff Potts, Ron Rifkin, Jesse Vint**

"Call me a hippy *one more time*, I dare you."

After the phenomenal success of *Easy Rider*, Universal gambled on giving several young filmmakers small budgets and creative free rein. It didn't pay off commercially, but did give us this idiosyncratic ecological sci-fi.

Bruce Dern plays Lowell, a crewman on a space freighter – one of three carrying all that survives of Earth's forests. When an order comes through to jettison and explode the bio-domes, the distraught botanist kills his crewmates to save the last one.

A dramatic premise, but the aftermath is the main focus, as the lonely Lowell develops a strangely paternal relationship with Huey and Dewey, two endearing repair droids with the waddling gait of a baby with a full nappy (ingeniously operated by double-amputees).

Dern manages to maintain sympathy for this triple-murderer, and there's pleasure to be had from quirky design details (like a robotic-arm pool table) and the elegiac score, punctuated by Joan Baez folk numbers. While not possessed of great philosophical depth or scientific rigour, it's a film whose heart is in the right place.

Extras Bucking the trend, the "visual essay" (14 minutes) is a highlight; it details the differences in an early draft, using voice actors and some great illustrations. A film music expert talks through the cues (14 minutes). Critics Barry Forshaw and Kim Newman team up on a chatty commentary. A 2000 track by Dern and director Douglas Trumbull sees both men asking one another good questions.

Bonuses from the previous UK Blu-ray are also carried over. These include a vintage Making Of (49 minutes). As the film was largely shot on a decommissioned aircraft carrier, there's an interesting story to tell, with some great footage of droid costume fittings and Dern jogging on the deck. Plus: isolated music/score; gallery (635 stills!); trailer; booklet. **Ian Berriman**

> **"A dramatic premise, but the aftermath is the main focus"**

i Douglas Trumbull was inspired to cast double-amputees to play the droids by seeing Tod Browning's 1932 film *Freaks*.

THE GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY HOLIDAY SPECIAL

★★★½

RELEASED OUT NOW!

2022 | **12** | **SVOD**

Director **James Gunn**

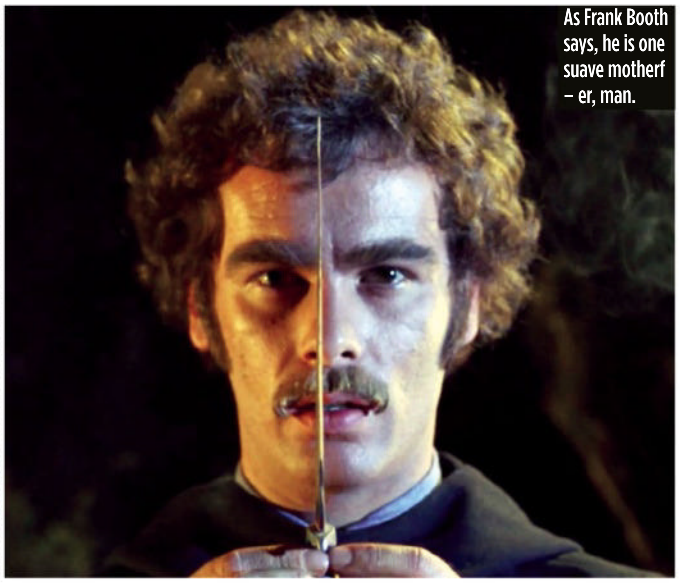
Cast **Pom Klementieff, Dave Bautista, Kevin Bacon, Chris Pratt**

DISNEY+ **Until now, Marvel's** TV operation has spotlit supporting characters from the movies or acted as R&D for icons-in-the-making. The title of this seasonal treat is a knowing riff on the infamous *Star Wars Holiday Special*, which brought George Lucas's heroes from big-screen to small with a catastrophic bump. Will the Guardians of the Galaxy find themselves stuffing an equivalent turkey?

Thankfully not. Written and directed by franchise supremo James Gunn, this is a slight but charming piece of MCU ephemera, more stocking-filler than blockbuster. It certainly doesn't stint on the festive vibe, throwing in sleigh bells, novelty jumpers and The Pogues. All that's missing is Shakin' Stevens as the herald of Galactus.

It's a quest for "legendary hero Kevin Bacon" in which Kevin Bacon plays himself – or at least the ironic meta-construct UK audiences know from the EE ads. An excuse for fish-out-of-water fun in LA, showcasing the comedy chops of Pom Klementieff and Dave Bautista, it's ultimately little more than a cosy Chrimbo hang with characters you love. You may find yourself missing the subversive bite of Gunn's authentic voice – the Bounty in the tub of Celebrations.

Nick Setchfield



As Frank Booth says, he is one suave motherf – er, man.

THE DUNWICH HORROR

Summer of Lovecraft

★★★½ EXTRAS ★★★½

RELEASED 9 JANUARY

1970 | **15** | **Blu-ray**

Director **Daniel Haller**

Cast **Sandra Dee, Dean Stockwell, Ed Begley, Lloyd Bochner**

BLU-RAY DEBUT **After success with** Edgar Allan Poe movies, American International Pictures decided to give HP Lovecraft a try. This was director Daniel Haller's second such effort (and AIP's third).

In the original story, an occultist steals a copy of the Necronomicon to help open a door to the realm of the Old Ones. This very loose adaptation retains basic components and dials up the sauce, adding the sacrifice of a pretty blonde (Sandra Dee); this involves much orgasmic lip-licking. It also turns Wilbur Whateley ("exceedingly ugly" on the page) into Dean Stockwell's softly-spoken seducer, all corduroy, big brown eyes and immaculately trimmed moustache.

Haller has a good eye for compositions with depth – the camera's forever lurking behind a display case or desktop clutter – and exotica great Les Baxter's score is pleasingly grandiloquent. Featuring psychedelic colours and dream sequences with orgiastic flower-children, it's Lovecraft for the hippie generation, an approach that now seems charmingly retro. You may want to light a joss stick.

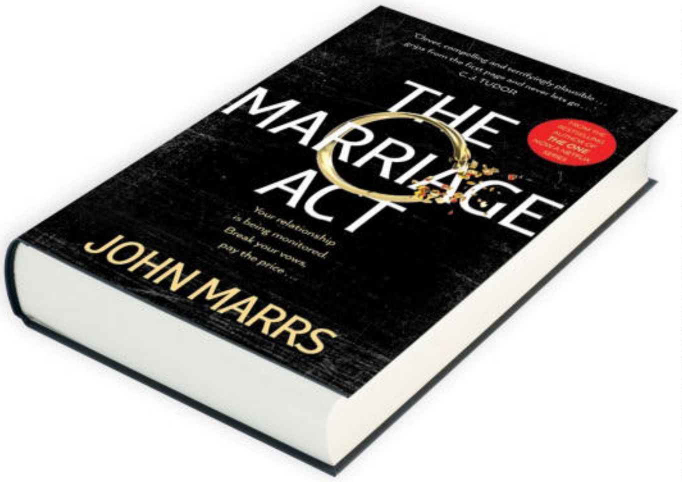
Extras Lovecraft-lovers Guy Adams and Alexandra Benedict provide amusing commentary; expect much joshing and many ripe enunciations of "my darling". Novelist Ruthanna Emrys explains changes to the story (16 minutes).

Music historian David Huckvale plays cues on the piano (32 minutes), pointing out diminished fifths and echoes of Bach and Handel. A Zoom chat between film writer Stephen R Bissette and horror author Stephen Laws lasts *over two hours*. Y'know, sometimes less is more... Plus: trailer; gallery; booklet. **Ian Berriman**

i The Arkham College scenes were shot around the University of Southern California's Mudd Hall of Philosophy.

(ROUND UP)

Fans of *It Follows* should enjoy **SMILE** (out now, 4K/Blu-ray/DVD/download), which sees a therapist becoming the next link in a chain of suicides who died with a creepy grin on their face. We said: "More chewy subtext than you usually find in a popcorn horror... Afterwards you might find yourself turning on all the lights on the way to the bathroom." Blu-ray bonuses: director's commentary, the short that inspired the film, a Making Of; deleted scenes, a score featurette. Starting out like a comedy of manners, festive horror-comedy **THE LEECH** (out now, Blu-ray) then turns into the story of a descent into madness. A Catholic priest invites a homeless man into his home – a decision he soon regrets... Graham Skipper impresses as the unravelling Father David, but the rinky-dink comedy music early on grates, and the blue and red lighting used latterly is starting to feel old hat. Ideally we'd have reviewed **DISENCHANTED** (out now, Disney+) last issue, but the screener gods, in their mysterious wisdom, deemed that it was not to be. In this sequel to 2007's *Enchanted*, fairy tale kingdom ex-pat Giselle and her family move to suburbia, where a wish gone wrong turns her into a wicked stepmother... Our GamesRadar colleagues said: "The perk 'n' pep isn't as infectious this time around, and the songs fail to tap toes like the original's." Finally, the latest TV box sets include **BATWOMAN** SEASON THREE (out now, Blu-ray/DVD), **HOUSE OF THE DRAGON** SEASON ONE (out now, 4K/Blu-ray/DVD) and **RAISED BY WOLVES** SEASON TWO (out now, Blu-ray/DVD). Hope Santa brought some.


Clever, compelling and terrifyingly plausible... grips from the first page and never lets go...
C J TUDOR
THE MARRIAGE ACT
FROM THE BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF THE ONE
Your relationship is being monitored. Break your vows, pay the price...
JOHN MARRS

THE MARRIAGE ACT

Trouble and strife

★★★★☆

RELEASED 19 JANUARY
400 pages | **Hardback/ebook/audiobook**
Author **John Marrs**
Publisher **Macmillan**

**At one point in *The Marriage* ***Act*, a character notes that they're "living in a Margaret Atwood novel". If they'd also referenced *Black Mirror* and Russell T Davies's *Years And Years*, you'd know what to expect from John Marrs's quasi-dystopian novel.

Set a few decades from now, the story takes place in a United Kingdom where walking down the aisle is heavily incentivised. Thanks to the Sanctity of Marriage Act, happy couples can sign up for a Smart Marriage offering tax breaks, preferable mortgage rates and higher status.

There's a hitch to getting hitched, however, as these benefits are conditional on installing an Alexa-like smart device in your home. This Audite (Latin for I hear/I listen/I learn) eavesdrops marital chat 24/7, and if the AI detects disharmony, it's programmed to put spouses on report. If the situation doesn't improve, a live-in Relationship Responder arrives on your doorstep with carte blanche to monitor *every* aspect of your life. Before long you could be facing state-sanctioned divorce – and social and financial ruin.

It's an intriguing premise that grabs you from the moment a popular influencer (and face of Smart Marriage) kills herself in the opening chapter. Marrs skilfully evokes a future Britain where being single is seriously bad for your life prospects, shifting the focus between a seemingly unconnected group of point-of-view characters with very different perspectives on relationships.

Whether they're opportunistic vloggers, morally suspect counsellors or older couples feeling trapped by the system, they generally behave and talk like real people with real concerns; most are impressively relatable.

Marrs also excels when it comes to the worldbuilding. *The Marriage Act* is cleverly structured to drip-feed information organically, gradually revealing the state of the union(s) through a clever mix of character interactions, news reports and public information messages.

But while *The Marriage Act* is nominally set in the future, it's unquestionably a book about the present. The book's pivotal technology feels plausible because it's just a few iterations from what we know now. Marrs has a futurologist's eye for mining contemporary concerns about the ways AI and deepfakes could one day be used to manipulate the public, and also gives dating apps an upgrade by using DNA to find a perfect genetic match – a theme he explored in more detail in his 2017 bestseller *The One*.

Meanwhile, casual asides about Brexit, a privatised BBC and Covid-19 (there's also an ominous reference to "other" pandemics) anchor the story to the present day. On occasions, the book even dares to be optimistic about the evolution of society, imagining a country that has addressed gender pay inequality and turned body shaming into a hate crime.

But the overriding theme is that Britain is unlikely to learn from its mistakes. Indeed, the policy makers in the book – particularly its shadowy Dominic Cummings-like puppetmaster – could easily have stepped out of 2022, their barefaced efforts to cling onto power feeling scarily familiar.

The One was turned into a high-profile Netflix series in 2021, and *The Marriage Act* feels like it's been written with screen adaptations in mind. There's also a Hollywood-like approach to death scenes that feels incongruous against the book's ordinary Northampton backdrops.

Ultimately it struggles to bring its intelligent ideas to a satisfying conclusion. Nonetheless, this is a socially aware novel packed with thought-provoking questions – even if the answers aren't always worth the wait. **Richard Edwards**

i Marrs hails from Northampton. In the mid-'90s he had a music column, Marrs Bars, in the *Northampton Chronicle & Echo*.

THE DAUGHTERS OF IZDIHAR
HADEER ELSBAI

THE DAUGHTERS OF IZDIHAR

★★★★☆

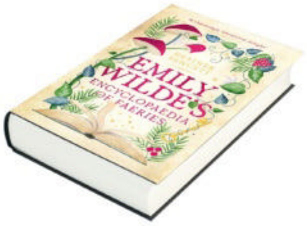
RELEASED 12 JANUARY
368 pages | **Paperback/ebook/audiobook**
Author **Hadeer Elsbai**
Publisher **Orbit Books**

With Iranian women's fight for their rights in the news, this fantasy feels horribly realistic in many ways.

The stories of two women from very different backgrounds – rich, privileged Nehal, who wants to attend the academy where she can learn to use her elemental "weaving" skills, and poor bookseller Giorgina – intertwine repeatedly. Nehal's marriage to Giorgina's lover is arranged, and both are involved with the Daughters of the title, a group fighting for women's rights – from the vote, to the plain right to speak for themselves legally without needing a male relative.

The weaving is intriguing, and proves pivotal to the wider political picture as their country, Ramsawa, has used elemental attacks in war to devastating effect in the past. But what the book really explores is power differentials: the power of one gender over another, the power of privilege, the protection afforded by rights in law, the power of democracy, and the balance between nations.

The complexity is reflected in the characters, whose decisions rarely boil down to a simple choice between "good" and "bad". Be warned, however: this is part one of a duology, and there's no real conclusion to the narrative, so as good as it is the book finishes in frustrating fashion. **Miriam McDonald**



EMILY WILDE'S ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF FAERIES

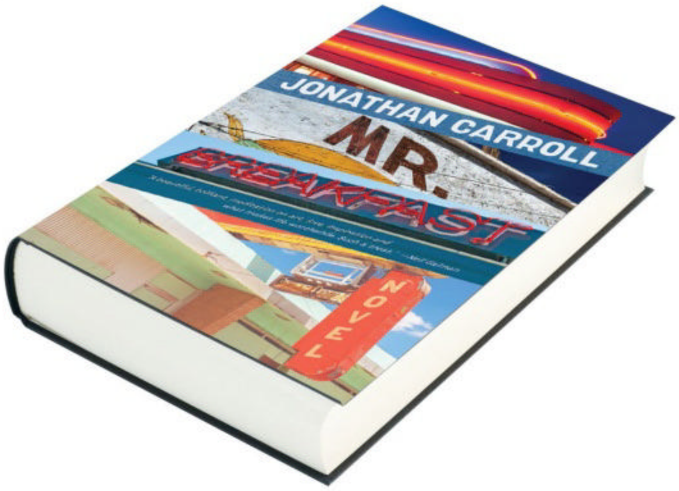
★★★★½

RELEASED 19 JANUARY
336 pages | **Hardback/ebook**
Author **Heather Fawcett**
Publisher **Orbit Books**

It's almost impossible to write this review without pulling out overused words such as "whimsical", "charming" or "delightful". Nowhere near as dry as its title suggests (don't expect a *Fantastic Beasts*-style glossary), it contains a selection of early 19th-century diary entries penned by scientist Emily Wilde, opening as she arrives in a remote Scandinavian town to spend a chilly winter researching the faerie folk who live in the nearby forests.

Emily has trouble connecting with people and so the townsfolk are wary of their nosy visitor – right up until her colleague, fellow researcher Wendell Bambleby, arrives and takes charge, much to her annoyance. He's lazy, irritating and selfish… but he's also stunningly handsome and, possibly, a member of the faerie folk himself. Adventures ensue: a terrifying changeling child; missing people; an imprisoned king. All are filtered through Emily's calm, academic thought processes and onto the page, complete with footnotes and the occasional retelling of "Hidden Folk" tales.

Despite the analytical tone, the book still drips with wonder and magic. The central love story is, perhaps, a bit of a distraction, but who cares? By the final act you're fully invested anyway. **Jayne Nelson**



MR BREAKFAST

A Design For Life

★★★★½

RELEASED 19 JANUARY
272 pages | **Hardback/ebook**
Author **Jonathan Carroll**
Publisher **Melville House**

Comedian Graham Patterson has a problem. After another dreary gig, he has to face facts: it's not the audience, it's *him* – he's just not that funny. Patterson needs some time out and, on a whim, decides to drive across America. Here's an opportunity to rethink his life and to do what he wants, like getting a tattoo on a stopover in North Carolina.

Except this isn't just any ink. Turns out Patterson has selected a design that enables him to see three very different lives that, depending on the choice he makes, are open to him. Should he commit to a relationship and have a family? Should he adopt a new onstage persona? Should he make photography his career?

In broad outline, Jonathan Carroll's slipstream novel is, for all its fantastic flourishes, a straightforward affair: a *Sliding Doors* book. And yet there's nothing remotely straightforward about Carroll's magic realism.

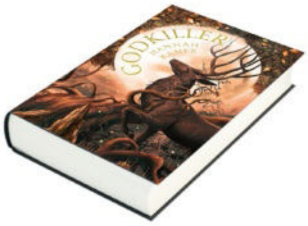
For a start, this isn't a book that's just about Patterson, for all that the initial focus is on him. By around halfway through, you realise that Carroll is showing us a gallery of characters, each of whose experiences is partly shaped by the way their lives interact with Patterson, as his life is by them.

Most of all, though, what lingers is the sense of compassion that comes through. Initially, *Mr Breakfast* seems to be about the tension between chasing success and finding domestic happiness. Except the choices the characters face are never binary, because life isn't that simple. Whatever Patterson and others who get the same eldritch tattoo choose, they will see timelines that potentially involve joys and hardships. And quite possibly dinosaurs and magic photographs too, because Carroll is, after all, a humorist.

A wise, warm and witty meditation on life and love that lingers long in the imagination.
Jonathan Wright

> **"There's nothing straightforward about Carroll's magic realism"**

i Jonathan Carroll's half-brother is minimalism pioneer Steve Reich, one of the world's most important composers.



GODKILLER

★★★★☆

RELEASED 19 JANUARY
290 pages | **Hardback/ebook**
Author **Hannah Kaner**
Publisher **Harper Voyager**

With her debut novel, Hannah Kaner displays an impressive breadth of vision as she constructs an animistic world where gods reside alongside humans, from the humblest deities – like the diminutive god of a town crossroads – up to terrifying, powerful gods of fire and war. Here, gods are chaotic, selfish creatures and have been banished from the land by royal decree.

Swordswoman Kissen is a Godkiller, hunting any gods threatening to disturb the peace of the kingdom. She enjoys her dangerous work until she meets Inara, youthful heiress of the influential Craier family who, for reasons unknown, has become bonded with Skedi, a god of white lies. As Kissen searches for a way to separate Inara and Skedi, the trio encounters Elogast, a former knight coaxed out of retirement by the King, Arren, on a godly mission of his own.

Kaner tells the tale through the perspectives of her four lead characters, giving each of them a vivid inner life and compelling history. The immersive mythopoesis paints a clear picture of the dynamic between gods and mortals, while action scenes are vigorously realised. Kaner leaves the door open to return to this world, but this is a thoroughly satisfying standalone experience and an impressively accomplished introduction to her storytelling talents. **David West**

Reviews

BULLET TIME

A BOOK IN BULLET POINTS

THE UNOFFICIAL GHIBLI COOKBOOK

RELEASED OUT NOW!
144 pages | **Hardback**
Author **Thibaud Villanova**
Publisher **Titan Books**

- We make this the fourth or fifth unofficial Ghibli cookbook, but it looks like the most authentic and elegant one.
- The author has written over 25 geek-themed cookbooks.
- Features 40 recipes of meals, cakes and biscuits actually seen in the films (there's a lot of food in Ghibli films) such as the herring and pumpkin pie in *Kiki's Delivery Service*.
- The recipes range from basic (egg and bacon à la *Howl's Moving Castle*) to quite complex and specialist (the shio ramen from *Ponyo*).
- Includes yummy close-up photos of all the dishes, and lots of tips and info about Japanese food.
- The recipes are clear, but some of the text relating the food to the films is weirdly esoteric.

CONAN: BLOOD OF THE SERPENT

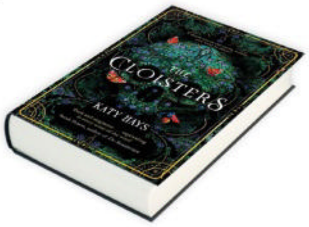
★★½☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!
432 pages | **Hardback/ebook/ audiobook**
Author **SM Stirling**
Publisher **Titan Books**

***Blood Of The Serpent* is a** prequel to Robert E Howard's last Conan story: the novella *Red Nails*, published in 1936. The tale recounts the first meeting of Conan and Valeria of the Red Brotherhood, when Conan is working as a soldier in Stygia, a sun-baked country of deserts and danger. There are slave rebellions and a curse to contend with, even as Conan pursues the elusive Valeria.

SM Stirling keeps the battles flowing fast and thick, and the burly hero remains the embodiment of teenage wish-fulfilment, the manliest man ever to grace the Earth. The story feels episodic, and there's a self-contained subplot in which Conan helps a warrior-woman called Irawagbon rescue her comrades from captivity.

She's an Abomean, analogous to an African Amazon, and her relationship with Conan seems intended to counter the troubling aspects of Howard's *Red Nails* – which is included, as a bonus feature, as the book's last section. It has dated poorly, being ripe with racist tropes. Black men are repeatedly described as physically repellent, there's some titillating sadomasochism, and a grimly inevitable sequence in which Valeria faces the threat of sexual assault from a black man. It leaves an unpleasant aftertaste, which sullies Stirling's brisk romp. **David West**



THE CLOISTERS

★★★½☆

RELEASED 19 JANUARY
297 pages | **Hardback/ebook/ audiobook**
Author **Katy Hays**
Publisher **Bantam Press**

A small fish in a big city, looking to make something of themselves – it's an old story, but it's a classic for a reason. Is ambition enough to drive success when everything seems against you?

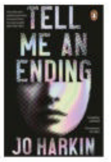
Ann Stilwell is an art history scholar who arrives in New York to find her summer placement cancelled, but is quickly swept up into an assignment at The Cloisters, a gothic museum where she's put to work researching Renaissance methods of divination. Curator Patrick and fellow assistant Rachel are fascinated by the history of the tarot deck, but is there more to their obsession than academic interest? Ann becomes caught up in their world as she fights to prove herself.

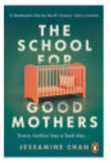
There's little of the supernatural here, beyond Ann's "intuition" as she learns more about the tarot, but *The Cloisters* is an engrossing tale of fierce ambition, toxic friendships and never being sure who to trust when you have secrets of your own. Ann struggles to escape the small-town life she hated, haunted by the death of her father and subsequent emotional collapse of her mother, and desperate to establish herself in academia.

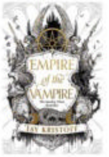
It's not quite thrilling enough to be a psychological thriller, but there are enough page-turning moments and slow reveals to entertain throughout. **Rhian Drinkwater**

REISSUES

Pick of the paperbacks this month: Jo Harkin's **TELL ME AN ENDING** (★★★★☆, 5 January, Penguin). Its *Eternal Sunshine Of The Spotless Mind*-esque premise concerns Nepenthe, a chain of clinics who offer memory removal. After legal proceedings regarding resurfacing memory fragments, the company are obliged to contact clients to offer to restore their memories – creating a dilemma for those who don't know what exactly they're missing. We said: "Skilfully handled, compelling and captivating throughout." Any mother who's ever felt judged over the quality of their parenting may find that Jessamine Chan's **THE SCHOOL FOR GOOD MOTHERS** (★★★½☆, out now, Penguin) strikes a chord. After its protagonist leaves her daughter unattended for a few hours, she's sent to a school to be taught to be a better parent. We said: "A compelling story and a distressingly real setting… There's little resolution here though, just a series of agonies and unfairnesses." Finally, our reviewer *really* did not get on with Jay Kristoff's brick-thick **EMPIRE OF THE VAMPIRE** (★★☆☆☆, 19 January, Harper Voyager). Set in a world where the sun no longer shines properly, greenery has become fungus, and vampires are slowly taking over, it follows hero Gabriel de Léon's desperate journey to his former monastery. We said: "Littered with clichés… And laden with references to genitals and breasts, so desperate is the book to seem adult."







BURROWED

★★★☆☆

RELEASED 10 JANUARY

400 pages | **Paperback/ebook**

Author **Mary Baader Kaley**

Publisher **Angry Robot**

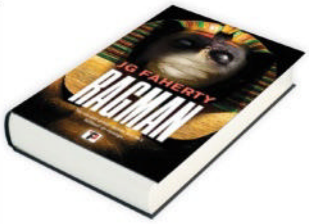
***Burrowed* feels like a** contemporary twist on the far-future world of HG Wells's *The Time Machine* – though Wells was famously a supporter of eugenics, while Mary Baader Kaley clearly has a more enlightened view about humans with physical differences.

In this future, a global virus has split humanity into the physically perfect but mentally slow Omniterraneans, who live on the surface and do all the manual work, and the physically challenged, almost permanently ill Subters, who live underground and do the sciency stuff.

Their fragile co-existence is coming increasingly under threat, with extremists on both sides kicking up trouble. Could a diminutive girl with extreme photosensitive eyes, a severely limited life expectancy and not even a name at the start of the novel be the savour the two worlds need?

What starts as an almost Dickensian travelogue of misery develops into a more intriguing medical procedural within a dystopian conspiracy thriller. Huge dollops of cheesy sentimentality and the central character's annoying niceness and repetitive flip-flopping over whether to trust other characters threaten to derail the book at times, but never quite do. Strong central ideas and quirky world-building details (the canarymice are a particularly neat touch) keep it on track.

Dave Golder



RAGMAN

★★½☆☆

RELEASED 10 JANUARY

272 pages | **Hardback/paperback/ebook**

Author **JG Faherty**

Publisher **Flame Tree Press**

Oh mummy! This entertainingly silly horror novel exhumes a classic monster that has fallen out of favour in recent years.

There's a murderer loose in New York, and detectives Tom Reardon and Dan Reese are on the case. Whoever the killer is is leaving a bloody trail through the city's wealthy socialites, breaking into locked rooms and aircraft before vanishing into thin air. As Reardon and Reese investigate they uncover a string of clues that suggest a connection to ancient Egypt…

Ragman is defiantly old-school in its approach, and while not exactly *good*, it's a lot of fun. There's something amusingly Garth Marenghi-esque about JG Faherty's mundane descriptions of supernatural phenomena (spells are simple incantations, and the mummy itself feels more like a teleporting WWE wrestler than a dire revenant from millennia past), the frequent exclamations of "Sonofabitch!" and the way that the villainous Ahmes the Second spends much of the book gloating about his evil plans like a '30s Batman villain.

Characterisation is not a strong point. The female characters are all under-written and Reese is hard to warm to, largely coming across as an unpleasant (and somewhat sexist) prick. Still, if you're in the mood for some daft monster action, you might get a kick out of this. **Will Salmon**

THE MARVELLERS

★★★☆☆

RELEASED 5 JANUARY

416 pages | **Paperback/ebook/audiobook**

Author **Dhonielle Clayton**

Publisher **Bonnier Books**

In 1960, Ruby Bridges became the first black child to attend a previously segregated American school… and many people weren't happy about it.

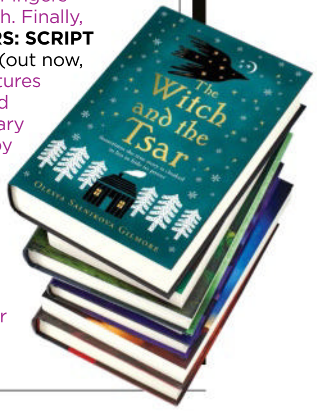
In *The Marvellers*, Dhonielle Clayton has taken this painful historical event and applied it to another black girl: a Conjurer from the Deep South attending a school full of Marvellers, who see her branch of magic as wrong and, tellingly, "dark". As a study of bigotry seen through a child's eyes, *The Marvellers* is important. It's also nowhere near as depressing as you might be expecting.

Clayton has, however, essentially reimagined the world of *Harry Potter*. She's not the first author to write about a magical school – JK Rowling certainly wasn't – but there are enough similarities here to get a lawyer twitching. Not only is there a magical Big Bad on the loose, there are excerpts from Rita Skeeter-style newspaper articles and young Ella's best mate even owns a magical rat (although he's at pains to tell everyone, Rowling's lawyers included, that it's actually a marsupial).

However, you know you're not in Rowling's world when a character is introduced as "a white man". Here, "white" isn't a default. Despite the book suffering from a paper-thin villain and some rushing towards the end, Ella's magical adventures are admirably colourful in more ways than one. **Jayne Nelson**

ALSO OUT

A few more books that we couldn't quite fit in. Set in sixteenth-century Russia, Olesya Salnikova Gilmore's **THE WITCH AND THE TSAR** (out now, Harper Voyager) breathes new life into the folk tale of the witch Baba Yaga, as she travels from her hut in the woods to Moscow. There she discovers that Tsar Ivan (yes, the Terrible one) is being manipulated by fearsome powers… Suzanne Wright kicks off a new fantasy romance trilogy in **THE WICKED IN ME** (12 January, Piatkus). It centres on witch Wynter Dellavale, who flees to Devil's Cradle, the home of monsters, when the immortal Aeons (who include Abel's brother Cain) try to execute her. Can you guess who will end up snogging? Holly Black returns to Elfhame for her latest YA book, **THE STOLEN HEIR** (3 January, Hot Key). Set eight years after the events of *The Queen Of Nothing*, it sees Suren, child queen of the Court of Teeth, joining Prince Oak, heir to Elfhame, on a mission into the icy North. There, Lady Nore is using an ancient relic to create monsters of stick and snow that will do her bidding… Louise Carey's cyberthriller trilogy Inscape, set in a future where tech corporations rule the roost, concludes with **DOWNFALL** (out, now, Gollancz). Can Tanta and Cole destroy Harlow 2.0, the mind-based operating system update that's turned the citizens of InTech into compliant zombies? Fingers crossed, eh. Finally, **AVENGERS: SCRIPT TO PAGE** (out now, Titan) features scripts and commentary on them by Marvel comics scribes such as Al Ewing, Jonathan Hickman, Mark Millar and Mark Waid.



THE WRITE STUFF
THE SFX AUTHOR QUESTIONNAIRE

Leigh Bardugo

The *Shadow And Bone* author is hopelessly addicted to adverbs

TAILI SONG ROTH

What is your daily writing routine like?

I'm up around 7.00am. I walk and feed our dog Freddy, have my breakfast and coffee, and then I write. I try not to look at email or get online until after lunch. I used to write long into the night, but now I stop around sunset.

Describe the room in which you typically write.

Our house was built in 1918 and the living room is small but has this wonderfully high ceiling and great big windows. It's always flooded with light. I can sit at the end of my green velvet couch and stare out at the garden, listen to the fountain and watch the birds. I do have an office, but I can't write in there. I need a couch so I can do maximum damage to my lower back.

Do you find it helpful to listen to music?

I draft every book to [Italian pianist] Ludovico Einaudi. There's usually one or two of his pieces I'll lock in on for a novel and I'll listen to them again and again. It puts me in a kind of creative trance. When it comes to revision, I'll often find my way to songs that embody the spirit of the story or the characters. For *Ninth House* and *Hell Bent*, it's a lot of Sisters of Mercy, Nine Inch Nails, Bauhaus and Joy Division.

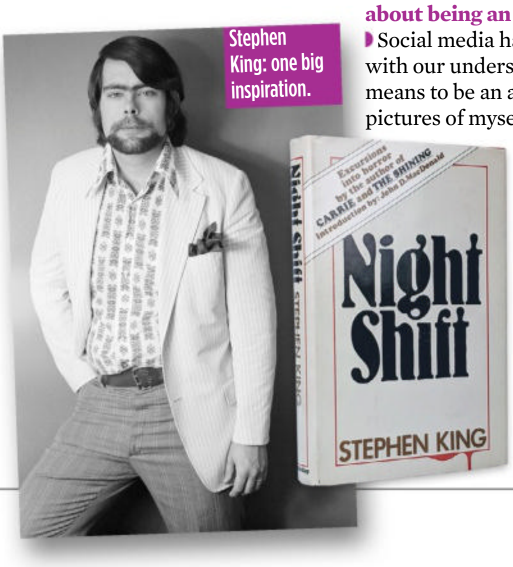
Do you have any writing "bad habits" you try to keep in check?

I tend to be too plot-focused. I like to build these heists and puzzles, and I have to keep checking in with my characters so that I don't lose their emotions in all the clockwork. Also I love an adverb. Unabashedly.

> "I have to keep checking in with my characters so that I don't lose their emotions"

Were you a keen reader as a child?

Dune was huge for me, a kind of high school survival guide. Louise Erdrich changed the way I thought about fiction. Stephen King taught me so much about story. I remember sitting around a campfire with my sixth-grade class and reciting "The Boogeyman" from memory. They asked to hear it again the next night. For an awkward, nerdy kid that was a real taste of power.


Excursions into horror by the author of CARRIE and THE SHINING
Introduction by: John D. MacDonald
Night Shift
STEPHEN KING

Stephen King: one big inspiration.

ALEX GOTFRYD/CORBIS/CORBIS/GETTY

What's the best feedback you've had from a reader?

Several people thought Harshaw's cat was a spy in the Shadow And Bone trilogy. No, just a cat. Though you can never really be sure with cats.

HELL BENT
LEIGH BARDUGO
THE NUMBER ONE BESTSELLING AUTHOR

What's the biggest misconception people have about being an author?

Social media has really messed with our understanding of what it means to be an author. I don't post pictures of myself in rumpled pajamas, ambling around my living room, trying to crack a scene. If you look at social, you might believe that it's all packed tour stops and set visits and cheering crowds at Comic-Con. But the job is really not about that at all. The bulk of your professional life is just you alone with the page.

What's the best piece of writing advice you've received or read?

I just saw an old interview with David Bowie, where he talked about wading into the sea and that sensation when your toes just barely touch the bottom, and you can just hold your head above the waves. It's not comfortable. But you're not drowning. He said that's the space you should be creating from because that's where you do your best work. ●

Hell Bent is available to buy from 10 January, published by Gollancz.

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GOTHAM CITY: YEAR ONE

The Noir Knight

★★★☆☆

- **RELEASED OUT NOW!**
- Publisher **DC Comics**
- Writer **Tom King**
- Artist **Phil Hester**

ISSUES 1-3 **Few superheroes are** associated with a location in quite the same way Batman is with Gotham City – and in this latest six-issue DC miniseries, we get a hard-edged look at the city's dark and violent past.

Written by the ever-prolific Tom King, the series is set in the mid-'60s, when Gotham was a bright new city that hadn't yet become a deadly playground for costumed villains and vigilantes. When the youngest child of the Wayne family is abducted by a figure calling themselves the "Bat-Man", private investigator Samuel "Slam" Bradley is hired to deliver the requested ransom.

The deal soon turns sour, however, and in these first three issues, Bradley finds himself unearthing secrets and corruption in a complex tale with a surprising lack of superheroics.

Aside from a present-day framing device featuring an ageing Bradley telling his story to Bruce Wayne, *Gotham City: Year One* owes more to noir classics like *The Big Sleep* and *The Maltese Falcon* than it does to more traditional Batman comics.

This isn't unfamiliar territory for King – he's already been playing with noir archetypes in his series *The Human Target* – and here he pushes the narrative in some surprisingly harsh directions. The story closely references historical details like the tragic 1932 "Lindbergh Baby" kidnapping, and doesn't hold back from exploring the often violent racial prejudices of the time.

Artist Phil Hester gives the visuals plenty of muscular energy, delivering impactful pages that are sometimes reminiscent of Frank Miller's *Sin City*. He's smartly aided by dazzling work from colourist Jordie Bellaire.

The result is a well-crafted and stylish comic – but the mystery-box plotting of these first three issues also fails to deliver a narrative hook or a genuine point to the series, beyond stripping the Batman mythos down to its thriller roots.

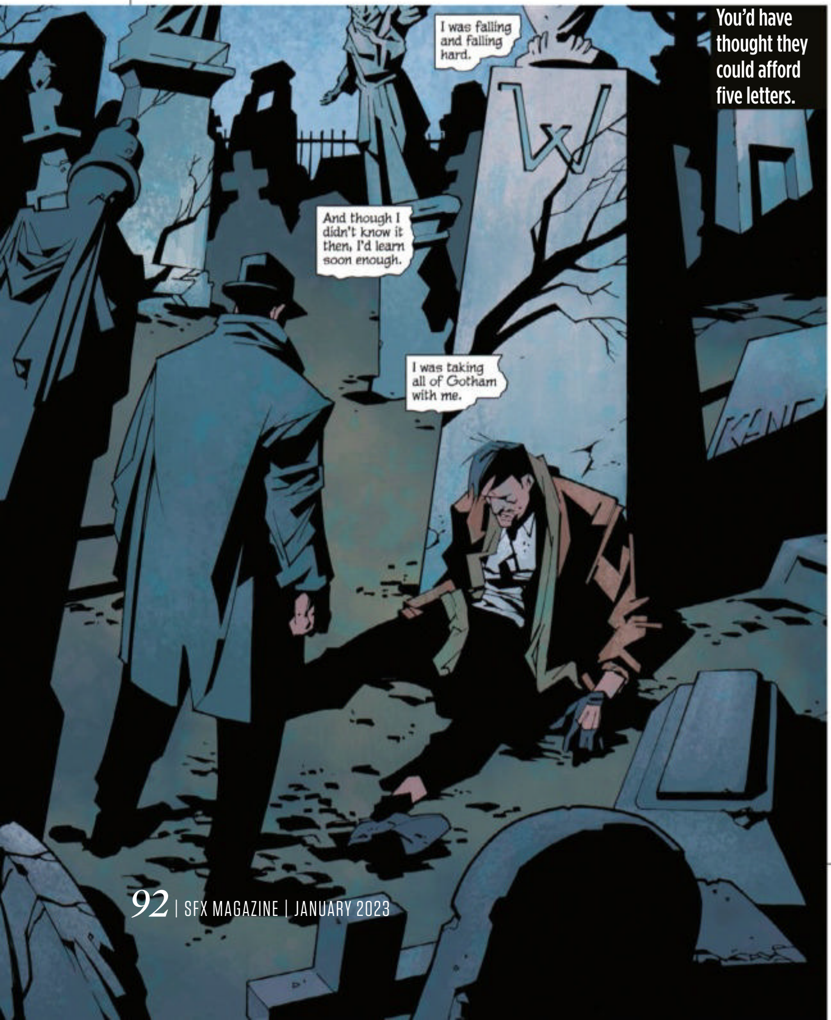
> **"The series is set in the mid-'60s, when Gotham was a bright new city"**

While it's a brave move to attempt the closest thing DC have done in years to a genuine crime comic, it doesn't feel like King has found much to say in these first three issues that we haven't read before in other Batman stories. It also doesn't help that this type of gritty crime comic has been done much better by the writer/artist team of Ed Brubaker and Sean Phillips in series like *Criminal* and *Reckless*.

Stuck between its superhero roots and its noir influences, *Gotham City: Year One* is a fascinating experiment, but one that hasn't managed to justify its own existence – at least not yet, anyway.

Saxon Bullock

i "Slam" Bradley has been around longer than Batman, having debuted in issue one of *Detective Comics* in March 1937.


I was falling and falling hard.
And though I didn't know it then, I'd learn soon enough.
I was taking all of Gotham with me.

You'd have thought they could afford five letters.

...SHUT UP!
CRRRAAAAACK

THE NEW CHAMPION OF SHAZAM

★★★★☆

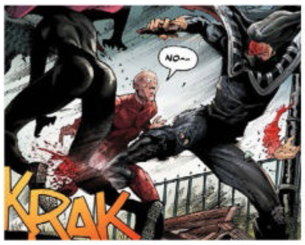
- **RELEASED OUT NOW!**
- Publisher **DC Comics**
- Writer **Josie Campbell**
- Artist **Evan "Doc" Shaner**

ISSUES 1-4 **When it comes** to bright, kid-friendly superheroes, Billy Batson and his adult alter-ego Shazam have been the best choice for a long time. Thanks to recent DC continuity shenanigans, however, Billy has lost his powers and vanished – and it's up to his foster sister Mary to take on the mantle of Shazam in this new four-issue miniseries.

It's a traditional tale of ordinary life vs superhero craziness, as Mary is gifted with Billy's powers, but then forced to abandon her college studies when her foster parents unexpectedly go missing. Her attempts to use her new powers to track them down set off a whole series of colourful misadventures and luridly realised action set-pieces.

Josie Campbell's script brings plenty of charm and goofy humour to the story, while making sure that the quieter, more emotional moments land properly. On art duties, Evan "Doc" Shaner captures just the right kind of nostalgic and pulpy tone, and also pulls off some wonderfully expressive characterisation in the dialogue sequences.

Admittedly, the story could have done with more room to breathe – it feels like there's at least six issues of plot crammed into four – but this is still a lively, likeable adventure that shows how satisfying all-ages superhero comics can be when they're done well. **Saxon Bullock**



VANISH

★★★☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

Publisher **Image Comics**

Writer **Donny Cates**

Artist **Ryan Stegman**

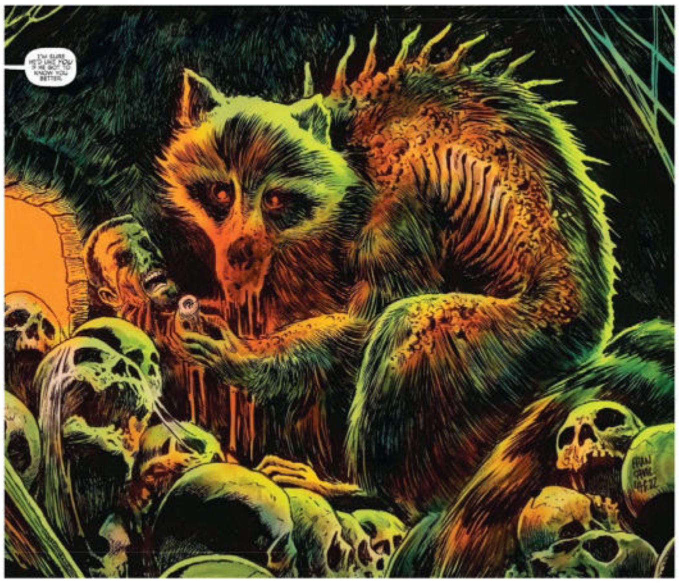
ISSUES 1-3 **Writer Donny Cates** and artist Ryan Stegman don't do subtle; for proof, look to their recently concluded, gleefully over-the-top run on Marvel's symbiote antihero *Venom*. They've channelled the same unhinged energy into this new ongoing series.

It's the story of Oliver Harrison, who saved the world from a magical threat as a child, but has grown up into a paranoid mess with a substance abuse problem. Oliver's attempt at living a normal life ends when a superhero team are revealed as evil adversaries from his past, and soon the story is throwing in massive fight sequences and plenty of gore as our protagonist goes increasingly off the rails.

These first three issues are fast-moving and often thrilling as they skewer "chosen one" fantasy clichés, with Cates never being afraid to push an action set-piece into weirder or nastier territory.

Stegman's art is similarly attention-grabbing, showcasing imaginative designs and impactful violence, but it can't cancel out some significant storytelling problems. There's a little *too* much happening in these overstuffed opening issues, along with a main character who verges on being genuinely unlikeable.

The creators may be able to solve these flaws in future, but *Vanish* is currently not quite delivering the satisfyingly hard-edged fantasy thriller it's aiming for. **Saxon Bullock**


I'M SURE HE'D LIKE YOU IF HE GOT TO KNOW YOU BETTER.

CREEPSHOW

Stories to make you Shudder

★★★★☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

Publisher **Skybound Entertainment/ Image Comics**

Writers/artists **Various**

ISSUES 1-3 **Considering that** Stephen King and George Romero's 1982 film took its cue from the classic EC Comics of the '50s, it's appropriate that an old-fashioned grisliness pervades this new comic, spun off from the Shudder anthology show.

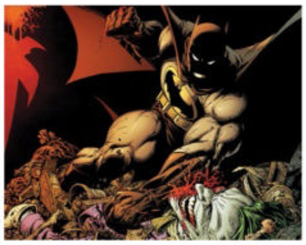
With a strict morality running through each tale, there's inevitably a degree of sameyness about the stories in these first three issues, as the invariably venal protagonists eventually all receive their (usually deserved) comeuppance.

There's no compunction about inflicting mortal pain upon youngsters either, as demonstrated in issue one by Chris Burnham's ominous "Take One", which teaches a trio of trick or treaters about the importance of only taking a single candy bar. Paul Dini and Stephen Langford's "Shingo" – energetically drawn by John McCrea – about a carnivorous beast who devours an entire children's birthday party, goes rather too far over the top in that regard, though.

There's a timeless MR James-ish air to David and Maria Lapham's "The Gorgamorrah Tree" in issue two, which centres on an ancient oak which insidiously gets its infernal roots into the fraying mind of a teenage girl. Illustrated in an endearingly cartoony style by Erica Henderson, Steve Foxe's "Creator Rites", the story of an elderly comic book artist who's defrauded by his carer, is another highlight.

Shifting between a barber shop and some hunters meeting a sticky end in the woods, L Marlow and Francisco Francovilla's tense "Hair" in issue three is enhanced by the latter's gritty artwork. Ariela Kristantina and Jorge Corona's "The Bridge", about a superficial influencer who foolishly refuses to dress modestly when visiting a sacred temple is a misstep, though – the only one to date in what's been a suitably spine-chilling offering. **Stephen Jewell**

i The original 1982 *Creepshow* movie was also turned into a graphic novel by *Swamp Thing* co-creator Bernie Wrightson.



BATMAN/SPAWN

★★★★☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

Publisher **DC Comics**

Writer **Todd McFarlane**

Artists **Greg Capullo, Todd McFarlane**

ONE-SHOT **Cleverly tying the** characters together through a mutually shared detail in Bruce Wayne and Al Simmons's tragic histories, this 48-page one-shot proves to be an engaging, accessible read that's an ideal entry point to both DC's Caped Crusader and Todd McFarlane's Hellspawn, who are meeting here for the first time in three decades.

A relatively recent addition to the Batman rogues' gallery, secret society the Court of Owls make for intriguing adversaries with their nefarious machinations and their ferocious assassins the Talons – although there's also a cameo from a disfigured Joker, who is rendered in gloriously hideous detail by Capullo.

It's set mostly in Gotham, and good use is made of several of the city's memorable landmarks, particularly during the exhilarating climax (which ends on a poignant note, and also can't resist setting up the inevitable sequel). While he keeps his script taut, McFarlane sometimes has a habit of overexplaining things, though – one example being with the "Dead Zones" that reduce Spawn to Batman's level when they clash in the opening pages.

As an artist himself, however, he knows how to provide plenty of opportunities for the impressive Capullo to excel; he combines lavish splash pages with fluid figurework and dynamic layouts, deftly inked by McFarlane. **Stephen Jewell**

MARVEL'S MIDNIGHT SUNS

The Plight Of The Hunter

★★★★½

RELEASED OUT NOW!
Reviewed on **PC**
Also on **PlayStation 5, Xbox Series X|S**
Publisher **2K Games**

VIDEOGAME **Given the chance to** share a house with a bunch of Marvel heroes, what would excite you more? The prospect of fighting alongside them against Hydra and various supernatural threats? Or the prospect of buying them outfits which you can then demand that they wear? Well, here you can do both!

As the Hunter – the child of Lilith, a character created specifically for this game – you'll team up with names both big and relatively small in order to prevent your mum from calling the elder god Chthon into the world. Given the imminent apocalypse, there's a surprising emphasis on socialising with the heroes.

The turn-based battles are easy to navigate, without sacrificing difficulty or tactical options. Moves and skills are presented as cards, each of which clearly lays out important information such as damage, buffs, debuffs and so on. While you can theoretically only play three cards each time, there are ways to extend your turn. "Quick" attacks refund a play if used to KO an enemy, for example; and some cards allow enemies to be marked for a play refund on KO, regardless of the attack used. This, alongside environmental hazards that can be used to your advantage, encourages and rewards tactical play.

Attacks and abilities are well suited to each character. Spider-Man has attacks that allow him to swing from enemy to enemy, and one to web up a foe to prevent them from moving; Magik uses portals to move enemies and herself around; Wolverine heals himself when swapping one of his cards; and so on.

Between fights, you'll be chatting to your team at the Abbey. There's an enormous, well-written script (including some great jokes, and a few surprisingly deep moments) and a progressive friendship system that feeds into stats and abilities on the battlefield. It's a huge game, and one you won't begrudge spending a single moment of your time on. **Luke Kemp**

i There's a sly nod to Moon Knight, in the form of banners for a Khonshu exhibit at the Mid-Manhattan Museum.

"Look into my eyes, not around the eyes…"

THE WILLOWS

★★★½

RELEASED OUT NOW!
57 minutes | **Radio (now on BBC Sounds)**
Broadcaster **Radio 4**

AUDIO DRAMA **While MR James** is the writer usually associated with festive chills, this adaptation reminds us that there are works by his contemporaries equally deserving of being enjoyed by a roaring fire.

Algernon Blackwood's 1907 story "The Willows" follows two friends on a canoe trip down the Danube. Making camp on a small island in a desolate stretch of the river, surrounded by an army of rustling willow bushes, they slowly become aware that some strange, inhuman power means them harm.

It couldn't really be better suited to radio, being centrally concerned with the uncanny potential of sound: the gurgles, splashes and hissing of the river, a roaring wind "beating an elemental tune", and other, more mysterious emanations, such as a noise that sounds like a distant gong.

In adapting the tale, writer Stef Penney wisely excises one set of baffling manifestations which rather interrupt the slow build-up. Julian Sands brings just the right note of enervated despair to his half of the duo; Bill Pullman is slightly less sure-footed as the narrator, guilty of a few curious line-readings.

The soundscape is the main draw, and on the whole it feels a little *too* subtly engineered – you may experience a more powerful sense of gathering oppressive forces by reading the original story. **Ian Berriman**

ENYS MEN
ORIGINAL SCORE BY MARK JENKIN

ENYS MEN

★★★★☆

RELEASED **2 JANUARY**
44 minutes | **Download**
(vinyl edition follows in February)
Label **Invada Records**

SOUNDTRACK **Expect ragged** static, metallic clangs, and what sounds suspiciously like a wetted finger being run around the rim of a wine glass from Mark Jenkin's score for his film about a woman trapped in time.

As the director told *SFX* recently, editing, Foley and score were all worked on simultaneously. "I'm not a musician. But I've got an analogue synth I play melody on. Then I built a quarter-inch tape loop. It runs through two reel-to-reel tape machines, creating an infinite decay loop."

The results are fundamentally basic – key theme "Enys Pt 1" is built on a repeating four-note melody – but effective in establishing an air of the uncanny. Smothered in echo, this cue should appeal to fans of the blurry shoegaze practised by the likes of Flying Saucer Attack. Later it returns, scraped clean of most of its enveloping fog of static, for a "Pt 2" so lulling that it might induce REM sleep.

Other tracks would wake you with a start, however: "Hunros Pt 1", a relentless loop of radio signal whirl and thump, could easily feel at home on an LP by an obscure experimental noise act such as NON.

With the transitions between tracks smoothed by wind howl, crashing waves, and brief snatches of dialogue, it works very well in isolation, conjuring an auditory environment that transports you to the film's haunted island realm.

Ian Berriman

SHOOT THE HEAD

It'll take more than Oxy-10 to fix that.

THE CALLISTO PROTOCOL

The Dark Side Of The Moon

★★★☆☆

RELEASED **OUT NOW!**
Reviewed on **PlayStation 5**
Also available on **PlayStation 4, Xbox One, Xbox Series X and Series S, PC**
Publisher **Krafton**

VIDEOGAME **There's a lot to like** about the general vibe of this spiritual successor to *Dead Space* from co-creator Glen Schofield – shades of *Aliens* meet *The Thing*, with a dose of *The Expanse*'s contemporary hard SF holding it together. It's all grimy metal corridors with heavy doors, and weary, everyman spacers who can't believe the shit they're having to deal with when an extraterrestrial infection turns a space prison's entire population into pustule-covered zombies.

It's a good set-up, and makes for an incredible looking game as you explore a base on the moon of Jupiter, battling barely human creatures with a bone-crunching stun baton and an array of satisfyingly violent guns that blast off limbs and faces alike. Neither of which seem to bother the monsters you cross as you try to escape. There are no heroic aims here, no saving the galaxy, just a healthy desire to find a ship and get the hell out of there.

Unfortunately, while the set-up, looks and story have the makings of a decent sci-fi survival-horror blast, the combat completely fails to deliver. The core mechanics let you battle single opponents beautifully – dodging blows with left stick taps much like a fighting game – but most of the time you'll fight groups, and then the one-on-one approach falls apart completely, creating a frustrating cycle of deaths you don't have any real tools to avoid.

Playing on easy makes surviving easier and lets you enjoy the story, but never makes up for a fighting system that isn't fit for purpose.

Leon Hurley

i Discovered by Galileo in 1610, Callisto is named after one of Zeus's lovers. German astronomer Johannes Kepler had the idea.

WITCHFINDER GENERAL

WITCHFINDER GENERAL

★★★★☆

RELEASED **OUT NOW!**
47 minutes | **Vinyl**
Label **Trunk Records**

SOUNDTRACK **In the past, Trunk** Records have released LPs of *The Wicker Man* and *Blood On Satan's Claw*; the addition of *Witchfinder General* to their catalogue makes it a clean sweep for the three cornerstones of folk horror.

Given that Micheel Reeve's 1968 film features rape, torture, hangings and a vengeful axe killing, the score is at times surprisingly idyllic. Composer Paul Ferris assembled a 55-piece orchestra to record it. Expect plenty of shivering strings, and drum rolls of the sort you might hear just before the hatch opens on the gallows.

The prettiness comes in cues like "Nearly Home" and "Peaceful Interlude", which accompany scenes where Ian Ogilvy's Roundhead gallops home and enjoys tender moments with his beloved – before she falls into the hands of Vincent Price's sadistic Matthew Hopkins. Featuring flutes and delicate guitar picking, they suggest "Greensleeves" as played by someone who heard the classic folk ballad just the once, many years ago. "Richard Rides To Sara", a Morricone-esque variation, is another standout.

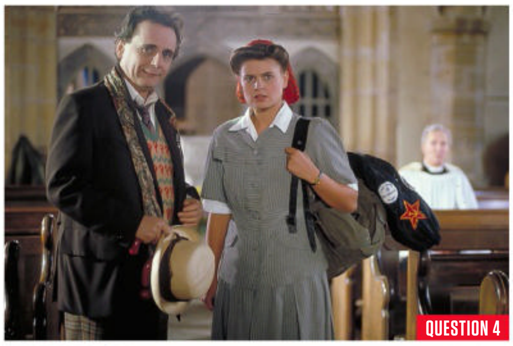
De Wolfe's 2013 CD release has since been withdrawn, and the packaging of this vinyl edition provides further incentive to buy: open up the gatefold sleeve to read notes on the film, and a glowering Price rises menacingly in pop-up form. Neat! **Ian Berriman**

Blastermind
The SFX quiz

THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Will it be V for victory when you enlist in our quiz about the more fantastical events of 1939-1945?

Quizmaster ***Ian Berriman, Deputy Editor***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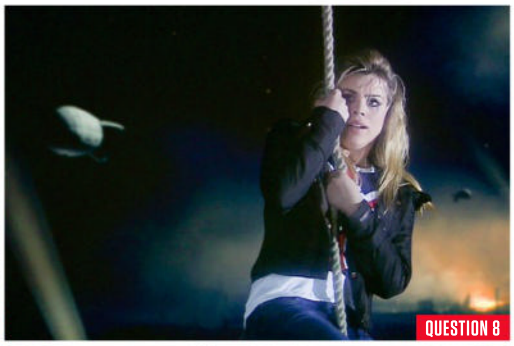
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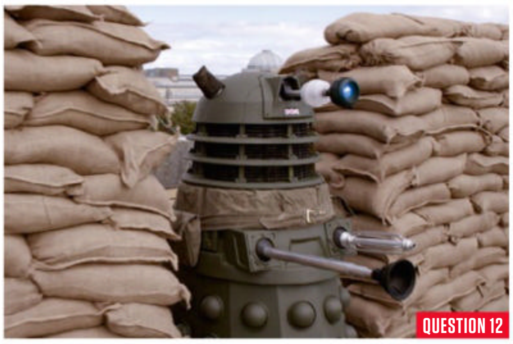
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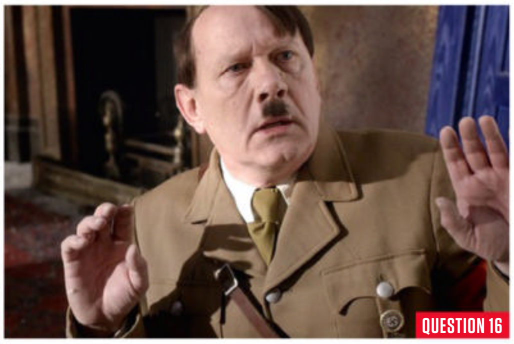
QUESTION 16

QUESTION 1

In the *Angel* episode "Why We Fight", where do the 1943 flashbacks mostly take place?

QUESTION 2

Where was the young Erik Lehnsherr (aka Magneto) incarcerated during the war?

QUESTION 3

Which SF novel has the subtitle *The Children's Crusade: A Duty-Dance With Death*?

QUESTION 4 Picture Question

Name this *Doctor Who* story set during the Second World War.

QUESTION 5

Name one of the two women that time-travelling love cheat Gary Sparrow is having relationships with in *Goodnight Sweetheart*. (First name will do!)

QUESTION 6

Which 1985 film sees a group of US soldiers, behind enemy lines in Italy, finding a crashed spaceship?

QUESTION 7

Name the British fantasy film which centres on RAF bomber pilot Peter Carter.

QUESTION 8 Picture Question

Name this *Doctor Who* episode set during the Second World War.

QUESTION 9

Which wartime tale features the magic words "Treguna mekoides trecorum satis dee"?

QUESTION 10

Who directed the movie version of F Paul Wilson's horror novel *The Keep*, about a Romanian castle where a mysterious entity is killing German soldiers?

QUESTION 11

Who wrote the novels *Blackout* and *All Clear*, in which historians from 2060 travel into the past to observe the war?

QUESTION 12 Picture Question

Name this *Doctor Who* episode set during the Second World War.

QUESTION 13

In which film is the destroyer USS Eldridge sent forward in time from 1943 to 1984?

QUESTION 14

And in which film is the aircraft carrier USS Nimitz sent backwards from 1980 to 1941?

QUESTION 15

What historical event does *The Time Tunnel* episode "The Day The Sky Fell In" revolve around?

QUESTION 16 Picture Question

Name this *Doctor Who* episode set during the Second World War.

QUESTION 17

In *Captain America: The First Avenger*, what's the name of the scientist who created the Super Soldier serum?

QUESTION 18

Which 2018 horror movie takes its title from the codename for the Normandy landings?

QUESTION 19

How many seasons of the *Wonder Woman* TV series starring Lynda Carter were set during WW2?

QUESTION 20

What's so unusual about the Romanian soldiers in the *2000 AD* strip *Fiends Of The Eastern Front*?

How did you do?

What medal do you deserve?

0-5 Milk bottle top
6-10 Chocolate coin
11-15 The War Medal 1939–1945
16-19 Military Cross
20 Victoria Cross

Answers

1 In a submarine 2 Auschwitz 3 *Slaughterhouse-Five* 4 "The Curse Of Fenric" 5 Yvonne/Phoebe 6 *Zone Troopers* 7 *A Matter Of Life And Death* 8 "The Empty Child" 9 *Bedknobs & Broomsticks* 10 Michael Mann 11 Connie Willis 12 "Victory Of The Daleks" 13 *The Philadelphia Experiment* 14 *The Final Countdown* 15 The attack on Pearl Harbor 16 "Let's Kill Hitler" 17 Dr Abraham Erskine 18 *Overlord* 19 One 20 They're vampires

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IN THE NEXT ISSUE

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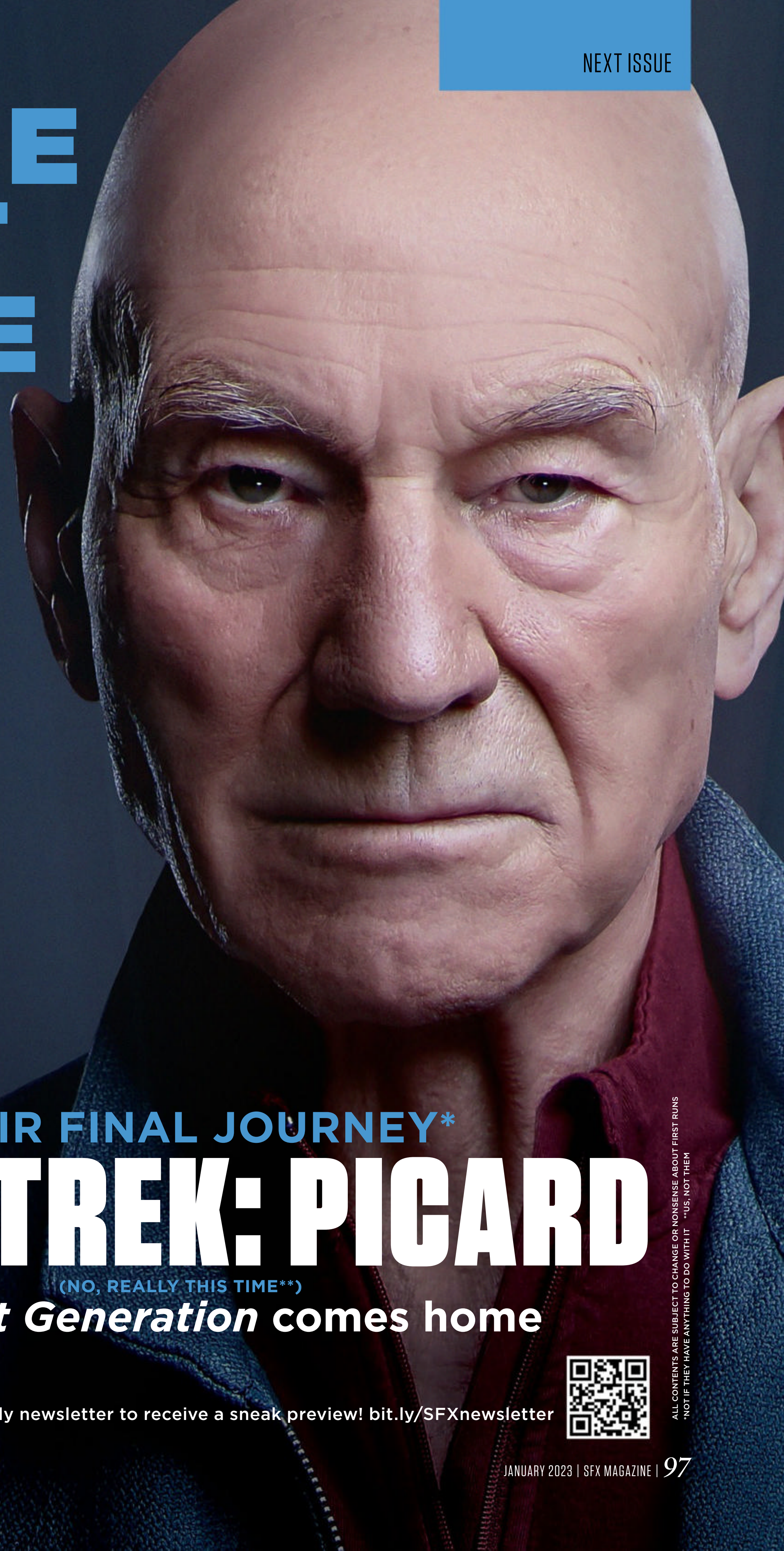
ON SALE
25 JAN



KNOCK AT THE CABIN

Dare you answer the door?

WINNIE THE POOH

But not the one you think…

ANT-MAN: QUANTUMANIA

If we don't print it we'll just say it's in a tiny font

DAVE GIBBONS

The legendary artist speaks!

PLUS!

Time travellers, talking cats and, yes, more

THEIR FINAL JOURNEY*

STAR TREK: PICARD

(NO, REALLY THIS TIME**)

The Next Generation comes home

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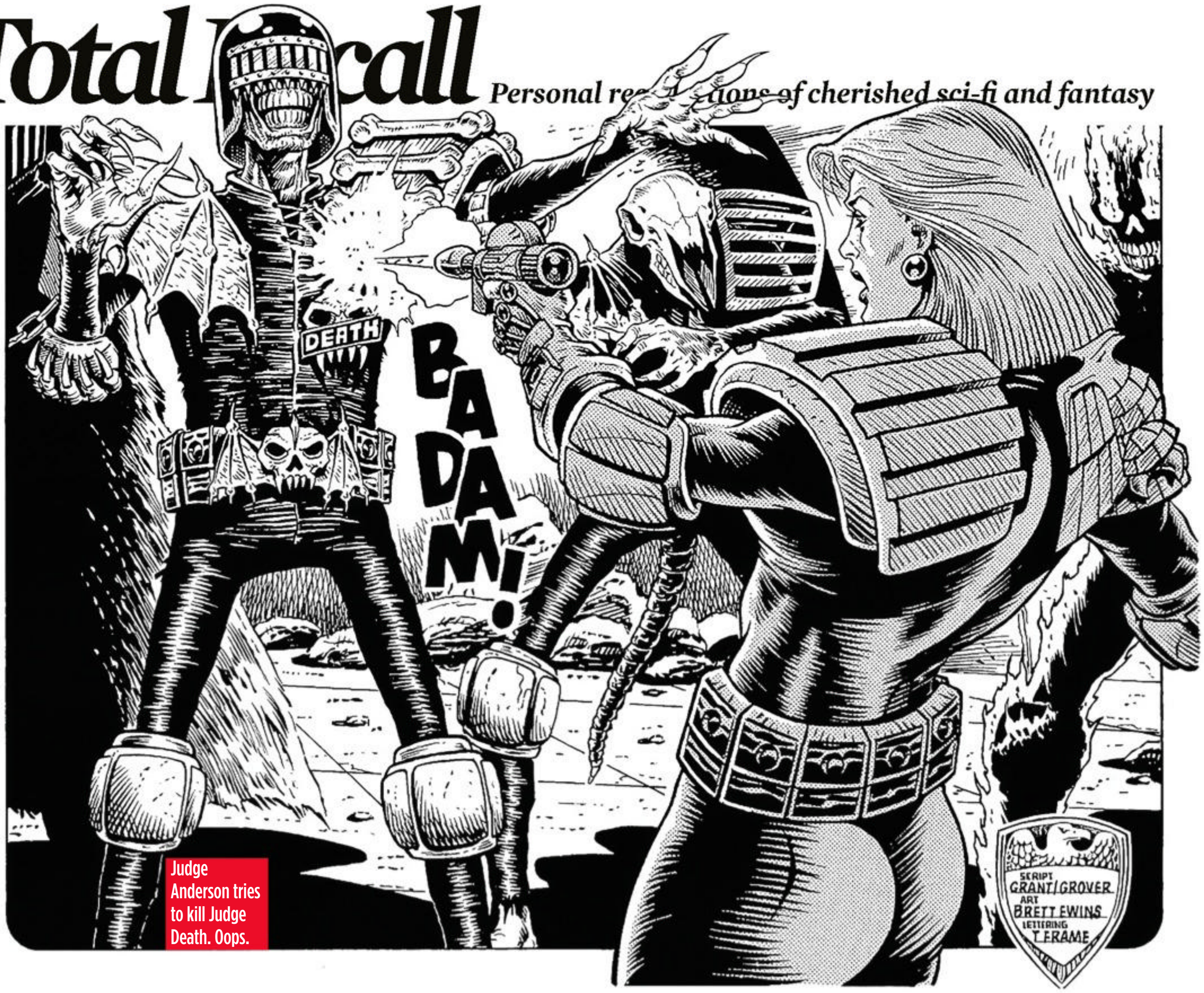
ALL CONTENTS ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE OR NONSENSE ABOUT FIRST RUNS

*NOT IF THEY HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH IT **US, NOT THEM



Judge Anderson tries to kill Judge Death. Oops.

Judge Anderson

David West, freelance writer

I've always loved comics. The first book I can remember reading was *Asterix The Gaul*, and I devoured any comic I could get my hands on, from American superheroes to *Lucky Luke* and Hergé's *Adventures Of Tintin*. My most prized possessions were a paperback collecting the early Stan Lee and Steve Ditko *Spider-Man* stories, and a massive hardback, *Superman: From The Thirties To The Seventies*. European or American, these comics were upbeat, and the heroes always won. There was, in short, nothing in them to prepare me for *2000 AD*.

The post-apocalyptic visions of Strontium Dog and Judge Dredd dispensing lethal justice were light years removed from Superman tangling with the Toyman, or Superboy dealing with Lana Lang's schemes to expose his identity. But even Strontium Dog and Dredd paled next to Judge Anderson, PSI Division.

My initial encounter with Anderson was the storyline where she took on the Dark Judges: Death, Fire, Mortis and Fear. On first impression, Anderson was more likeable and relatable than Judge Dredd, her rebelliousness appealingly human next to Dredd's unyielding devotion to the letter of the law and impregnably grim countenance. Yet where American superheroes invariably saved the day and protected the public, Anderson's battle with the Dark Judges was a nightmarish portrait of slaughter.

Worse was to come. The next tale I encountered, "The Possessed", has stayed with me ever since. Anderson sets out to rescue Hammy Blish, a young boy possessed by a demon. Ghastly denizens of another dimension plan to use him to open a portal to Mega-City One. Fighting her way through hordes of hideous creatures, she finally comes upon Hammy, on a sacrificial altar, surrounded by a vile mob. "The judge is here! She'll show you! She'll save me!" declares Hammy. But there are too many demons, Anderson can't fight them all before one completes the ritual. So she shoots Hammy. Dead. Problem solved.

This was not the sunny world of the Comics Code Authority – it was dark, twisted, thrilling. *2000 AD*: shocking young minds since 1977. ●

David is glad no Psi-Judge can read his thoughts. Dirty boy.

Fact Attack!

- **→ Psi-Judge Anderson made her first appearance in part two of the story "Judge Death" in *2000 AD* prog 150, 2 February 1980.**
- **→ Anderson's first name is Cassandra, surely a reference to the Trojan prophet whose decrees were fated to be ignored.**
- **→ Although writer John Wagner and artist Brian Bolland created Anderson, Alan Grant scripted the great majority of her solo outings.**
- **→ Editor Kelvin Gosnell secretly took a photo of assistant editor Deirdre Vine, then told Bolland "Make Anderson look like that."**
- **→ In the Big Finish audio *Judge Dredd: Crime Chronicles – Double Zero*, Anderson was voiced by Louise Jameson, Leela in *Doctor Who*.**

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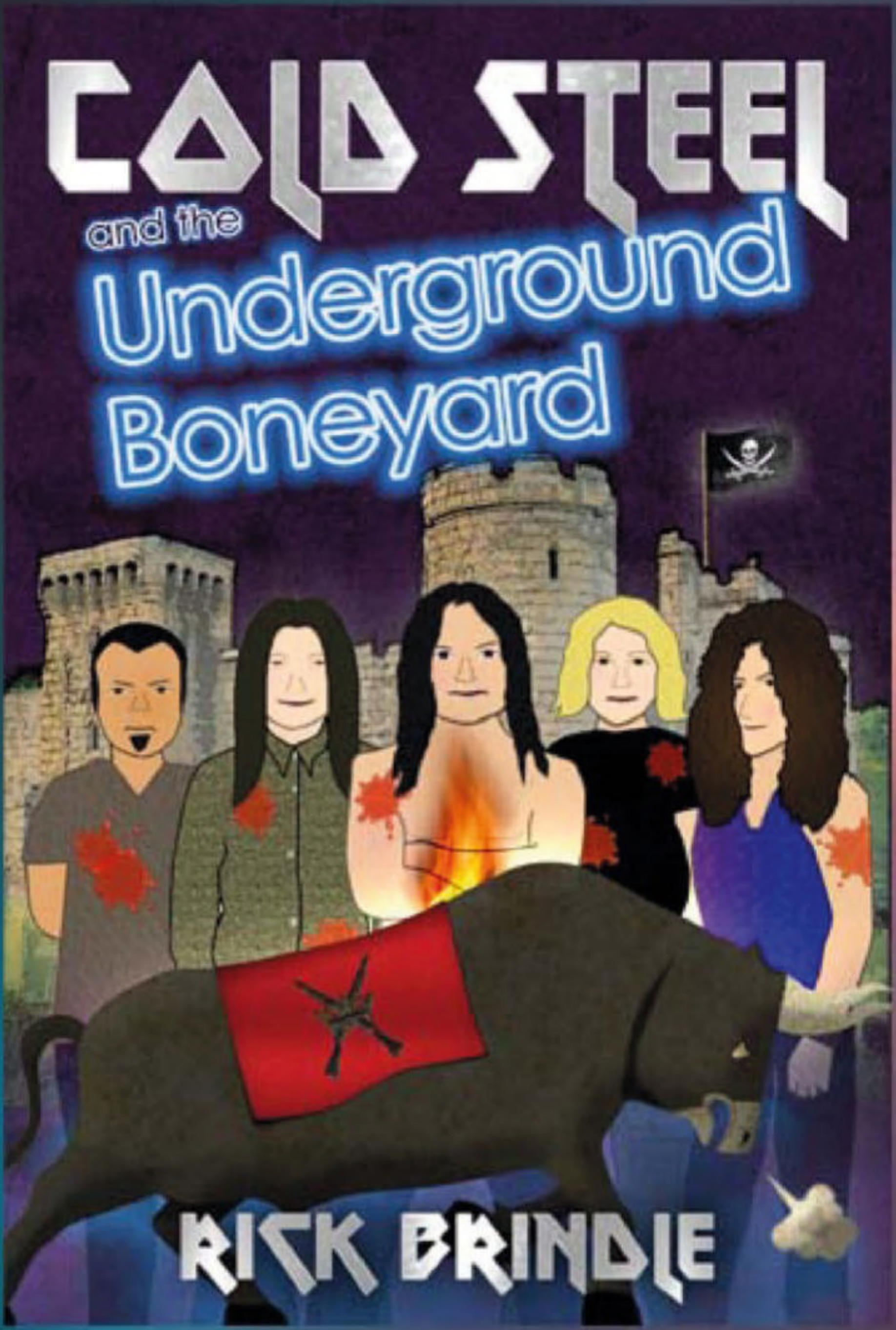
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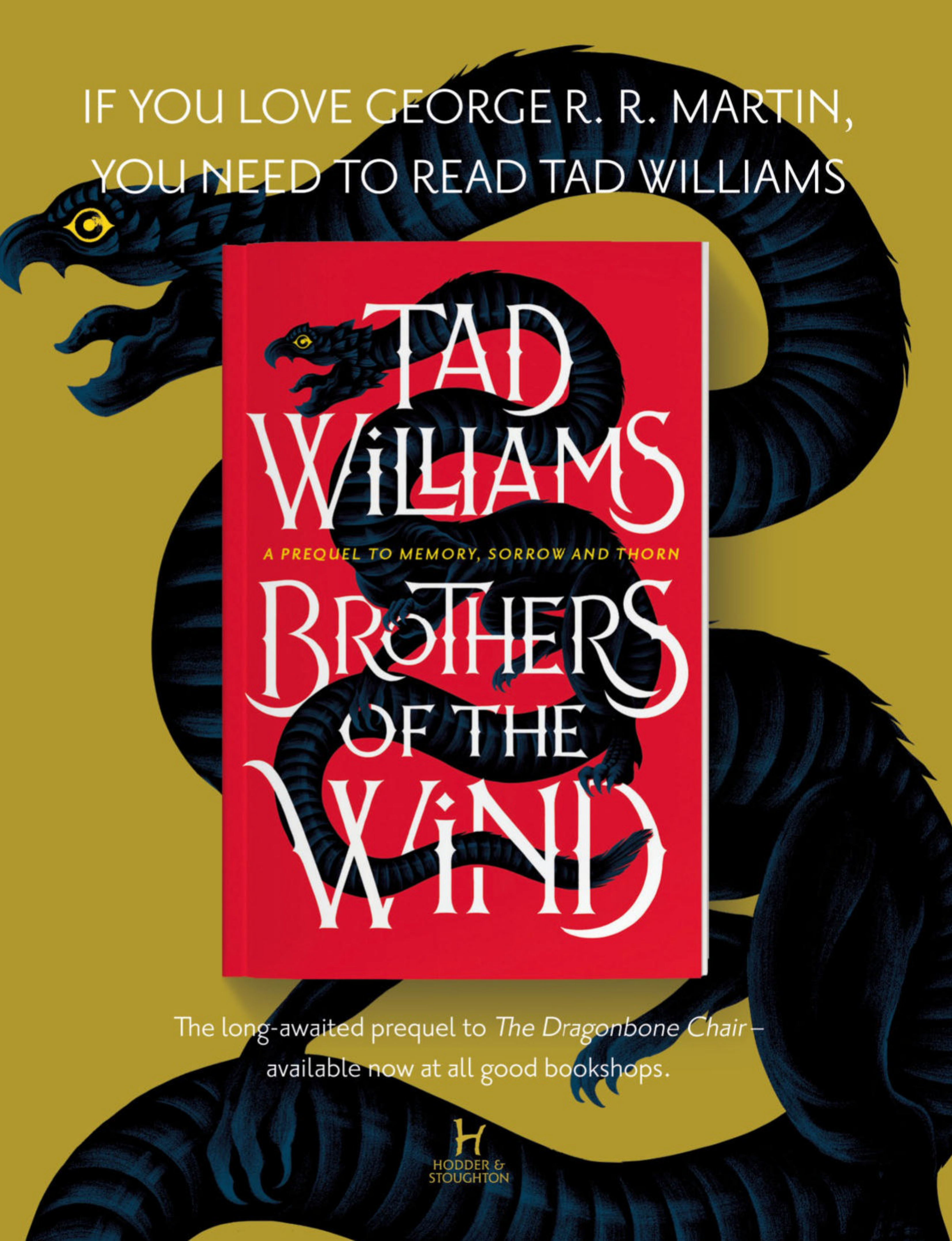
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